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Black women at the crossroads: Agency, interruptions, and oppression in education

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Black Women at the Crossroads: Agency, Interruptions, and Oppression in Education

by

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Dissertation

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Dedication

I dedicate this project to four phenomenal women who passed away too soon. My aunt Vivian Williams, aunt Jewel Finley, Grandmother Edna Pearl Dixson and Great-grandmother Ruby Hulbert who all left a lasting legacy of greatness in my life. They all played a pivotal role in my development as the successful woman that I am today. They are always with me in spirit, and in my heart.

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Abstract

This dissertation utilizes intersectionality, critical race feminism (CRF), Black feminist research and case studies to explore Black women's oppression in education. This research study contributes to a growing body of work on Black females' experiences of marginalization socially and educationally. The aim of this research was threefold: (a) to provide a theoretical analysis on the marginalization of Black females in society and exercising agency; (b) to explore my own memories and amplify my voice through an autoethnography, highlighting personal lived experiences of oppression in education; and (c) to provide a qualitative analysis on Black women oppression, amplifying the voices of participants and placing them at the center of the analysis. A small dataset of four participants allowed me to identify and report specific themes that emerged from their stories. Experiences shared in this research shed light on various ways Black females experience and navigate oppression. The findings reveal intersecting social injustices that played a key role in their educational experiences.

Table of Contents

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Abstract	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Black Girlhood Interruptions: Erasing Childhood Innocence	19
Chapter 3: Black Women at the Crossroads: A Path to Resist Oppression.....	41
Chapter 4: Voices From the Past: Black Women Oppression in Education... ..	57
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	76
References	94
Appendices	103
Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter	104
Appendix B: Approved Recruitment Letter.....	105
Appendix C: Approved Consent Form	107

Chapter 1: Introduction Problem Statement and Background

For Black females living in the margins of a racist/classist/sexist society, some of their first encounters with racism are experienced in school, a place where they are supposed to be nurtured, feel safe, and secure but instead are marginalized. Ricks (2014) marginalization as the social process of one made to “seem unimportant, pushed out of or not accepted in the mainstream” (p. 15). In America, the education system reproduces racist ideology in its organization, practices, and curriculum. Evans-Winters (2005) posited that Black females are likely to encounter racial discrimination in classrooms, curriculum, and pedagogy, which in turn, puts them at risk for academic failure. This could be seen in the schooling experiences of Black females. A growing body of research links racial discrimination and challenges racist ideologies in America’s school system. Black women’s voices need to be amplified in academic literature pertaining to this specific research subject. Exploring the everyday schooling experiences of Black women can highlight patterns of the role of racism that reproduce modern racial discrimination in schooling.

Evans-Winters (2005) confirms that because Black females face racism and classism, gender is an additional struggle in the process of socialization that happens in and outside of schooling. Experiencing this magnitude of oppression in education can cause one to have a dreadful schooling experience. Solomon and Rankin (2019) argued the need to reduce racial disparities in education and that there is a suffocating intrusion of educational inequities in the lives of Black students especially for females. Exploring the schooling role in reproducing racism could pinpoint how and why some Black females experience oppression. In order to examine the schooling role in the reproduction of racism, one must explore the schooling

experiences of Black women by providing them a platform to narrate their personal lived experiences. Therefore, a qualitative inquiry on exploring the personal lived experiences of Black women as they described their schooling experience was ideal. Black girls and women have always faced hardship in their efforts to thrive socially and educationally and have been victims of multidimensional hardships (Evans-Winters, 2005). Hardships such as racism/classism and sexism in schooling are just some of the oppressions that Black females' experience. According to Harris-Perry (2011), Black women's mental health and emotional obstacles are inherently political, with racism playing a key role.

From Black girlhood to Black womanhood, they face unique expectations as second-class citizens of the United States. In spite of being a citizen in the United States, Black women are still experiencing discrimination systematically, so the issues of these "inequalities that affect Black Women are embedded in the fabric of our nation" (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 16). Another key contributor to experiencing discrimination and racialized structures is White supremacy. Solomon and Rankin (2019) stated that White supremacy is not simply an assumption that to be White is to be better or greater than. It is a cultural, political, and economic system assumed on the subjugation of people who are non-White. Such structures hinder the advancement of Black women.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of study was to understand how Black women professionals narrate their schooling experiences. To that end, a group of Black women was the population of participants in this study. They reflected on their past schooling memories and narrated their personal lived experiences. Launching a study to analyze Black women's experiences has (a) unveiled that the participants experienced marginalization, (b)

discovered the phenomenon of oppressions such as racism and sexism (Hill-Collins, 2016), and (c) identified the ways that oppression has shaped the schooling experiences for Black women (Crenshaw, 1989). This study adds Black women's voices and unique stories to the academic literature. Consequently, assembling a theoretical framework, a methodology, and a research design allowed me to accomplish an analysis on the ways Black women narrate their schooling experience to discover oppressions in education.

Significance of the Study

This project introduces the reader to salient issues that impact and influence the day-to-day lives of Black women socially and educationally (Boukari, 2005). This research study afforded the participants the opportunity to represent their situated worlds of schooling experiences while being Black and female in the U.S. Despite the evidence in the academic literature of the existence of racism in education, limited qualitative research has focused on Black women professional's narrating their experiences of oppression caused by racism and sexism in education.

The qualitative research data I found most related to my research area are on the subjects of oppression of Black women teachers and administrators, oppression of Black women faculty, African American women superintendents, oppression on Black women activists, gendered racism in the workplace, Black women objectification, or marginalization of Black women scholars; within these subjects, professional Black women's voices have been silent. Evans-Winters (2005) discussed the "absence of Black females in resiliency literature and place a call to action to implement alternative theoretical approaches to study the interactions of race, class and gender on their educational experiences" (p. 4). The significance of this research study is that it unveils the illusion of race and the problem of racism (Fields & Fields, 2014) and the

racialized structures in education concerning Black females' schooling experiences (Evans- Winters, 2005). This study connects the experiences of oppression in education to Black women's educational hardships, specifically dealing with racial discrimination in P-12 schooling. This study can potentially be utilized as a tool of empowerment to other Black girls and women. I have a desire to give Black women a platform to share their personal lived experiences and to narrate their experiences of oppression in education through their own unique voices, voices that have not traditionally been given space in the academic literature. This research study adds to the field of African American women studies, Black girlhood studies, Black feminism and Black feminist thought, intersectionality, African American woman history, Black history, and urban Studies.

Research Questions

This study will answer a central research question: How do Black women professionals narrate their schooling experiences? This study also addresses the following research sub-questions:

1. What are some racist practices in education that impede Black female schooling?
2. How do Black women describe their schooling experiences?
3. What is the role of racism/classism and sexism in the schooling experiences of Black women professional's and how does it shape their lives?

Definition of Terms

Significant to this dissertation is the ability to apply essential terms to illuminate certain concept expressed in the study and to provide pertinent information to the reader regarding the subject topic. The following terms illuminate the study:

Childhood Innocence.

Childhood innocence emerged in the U.S. in the nineteenth century as an exclusionary social practice and regulates race relations by producing a particular childhood that perpetuates White supremacy (Garlen, 2018).

Critical Race Feminism (CRF).

CRF “draws from feminism and constitutes a race intervention in a feminist discourse analysis and embraces feminism’s emphasis on gender oppression, within a system of patriarchy” (Wing, 2000, p. 6).

Bullet/Bite the Bullet.

Black girl hardships that refer to various metaphors and meanings of *bite the bullet*. I will attempt to use the metaphor *bullet* to represent oppression, which represent the sufferings of negative experiences that most Black girls endure every day to survive.

Intersectionality.

Intersectionality draws on the interwoven nature of social categorizations as applied to a group of people regarded as the overlapping, simultaneous, and interlocking systems of oppression. The term draws on the notion that oppressions are not suffered separately but as a single, synthesized experience (Smith, 2014).

Marginalization.

Ricks (2014) defines marginalization as the social process of one made to “seem unimportant, pushed out of or not accepted in the mainstream” (p. 15).

Oppression.

Inequitable use of power and authority. A circumstance when people are governed in a discriminatory way and are prevented from having freedom and opportunities.

Racecraft

Fields and Fields (2014) coined the term racecraft as a metaphor for a system of belief, to describe a racial divide, suggesting that the ideas of race relations are not historically or sociologically accurate but are tools of racecraft.

Organization of Research

The organization of this research was done with hopes to bring an awareness to salient issues pertaining to Black girls and women's experiences of oppression. Chapter 1 provides an introduction and a critical literature review on the concepts of racism through interdisciplinary theories such as racecraft and everyday racism. Chapter 2 is my personal story exploring my own memories through an autoethnography, which presents specific life-altering moments, concerning the complexities of navigating identities, and highlighting examples of intersecting oppression, which is significant to this study. Chapter 3 is a theoretical inquiry that provides a critical review of Black women living in the margins of a racist/classist/sexist society and utilizing key elements of critical race feminism and intersectionality as integrated theories to address various ways Black women exercise agency.

Next, Chapter 4 is a qualitative inquiry that will explain methodological choices that I made in the completion of this research including an extensive narrative of each of the four participants' experiences, giving as much space and a platform for the powerful voices of these phenomenal women to shine. Finally, Chapter 5, the concluding chapter, wraps up this research, summarizing key research implications and providing powerful recommendations for the improvement of the schooling experiences of Black females. Overall, this project brings together voice and power to ignite revolutionary work in the

field of education.

Review of Literature

This review of literature offers a critical review of the transforming power of racecraft in America that filters into our education system. It addresses the conception of race in the context of racecraft, the soul of inequality in America, and the implementation of educational inequalities in our nation. The analysis demonstrates the various perpetuations of a racial divide to which Black girls and women in the United States are subjected to as well as exploring the ways in which these forces have informed the modalities of social control that has been exercised upon them. For Black females, specifically, this entails taking a look at the oppressive impacts of racism in education. In America, the original creators of this powerful illusion placed ranking status on people based on their ethnicity. Racism is the practice of hypocrisy predicated on one's ancestry. Fields and Fields (2014) explained that "the concept of race has no genetic or scientific basis yet race and genetics are treated as interchangeable terms" (p. 8). The color of our skin should not be used as the driving force of race when the concept of race is not scientific but a social and a cultural construct, a result of racist actions. Race inherently provides political cover for class oppression.

Shapiro and Oliver (1997) argued that deep patterns of racial imbalance are not visible when viewed only through the lens of income in the U.S., and the duress of a never-ending cycle of oppression impacts the Black community. For hundreds of years, race has been a bewitching concept, creating social and political conflict, and has been used as a political weapon on our society, continually disguising the true culprit of social conflict, which is class inequality (Fields & Fields, 2014). Fields and Fields (2014) argued that racist practices within US capitalism reproduce the ideology of race along with the illusion of its existence through racecraft, a

phenomenon interconnected with other forms of inequalities. Material inequality is the core inequality, which is then experienced in racist, classist, and sexist modalities. For Americans, racecraft blinds us to the soul of inequality. Race is an illusion. Race did not create racism. Racecraft continues to create and perpetuate the idea of race through classism. Fields and Fields (2014) coined the term racecraft as a metaphor for a system of belief, also a racial divide, suggesting that the ideas of race relations and racial divide are not historically or sociologically accurate but are tools of racecraft.

They divert our attention from racism, which can cause racial divide as if it exists naturally, without any socio-historical cause. This suggestion presents the idea that the craft of race is parallel to witchcraft in ways that connects to rituals of dominance and control. This spell-casting prejudice tool has been used to shape the way Americans view themselves and one another. Fields and Fields (2014) contend that race exists in everyone's minds: This "witchcraft and racecraft are imagined, acted upon, and re-imagined, the action and imagining inextricably intertwined" (p. 17).

If race is an imaginary thing that exists in the minds of Americans as well as in our social relationships, how did America go from racism to race? By using words like *majority* and *minority* Americans continue to perpetuate racism. Fields and Fields (2014) contend that minority "ranks alongside the color of the skin as a verbal prop for the mental trick that turns racism into race" (p. 27). With this in mind, our words and everyday actions place groups into dominant or subservient roles while often hiding from view practice of oppression in the U.S. Fields and Fields (2014) gives a parallel view concerning how established customs and "rules designed to promote feelings of inferiority and superiority travel in tandem with expectations of deference and with

rituals that simultaneously create and express the requisite feelings” (p. 35). These are examples of how the ideology of race becomes real through everyday relationships in which people choose to engage in. Fields and Fields (2014) described the concept of racecraft in various ways and stated: (a) “Distinct from race and racism, racecraft does not refer to groups or to ideas about groups’ traits, however odd both may appear in close-up. It refers instead to mental terrain and to pervasive belief,” and (b) “racecraft originates not in nature but in human action and imagination; it can exist in no other way” (p. 18).

The imagination, and the everyday actions, and the historical emerge as part of moment-to-moment cleverness, and (c) “racecraft is not a euphemistic substitute for racism. It is a kind of fingerprint evidence that racism has been on the scene” (p. 19). An example of the deeply rooted witchcraft in America is “Americans wove racist concepts into a public language about inequality that made ‘Black’ the virtual equivalent of ‘poor’ and ‘lower class,’ thus creating a distinctive idiom that has no parallel in other Western democracies” (Fields & Fields, 2014, p. 11). This system creates inequality to hinder the advancement of Black Americans, especially in education.

The continuing sorcery of systemic division, the bewitchment of social exclusion, and the hocus-pocus hierarchy keeps the illusion alive, this “now you see it, now you don’t ... quality is what makes racism the practice of a double standard based on ancestry possible” (Fields & Fields, 2014, p. 25). Fields and Fields (2014) encourage Americans to be conscious of the inner horizon of racecraft that suppress the perception of self. It is vitally important for the American people to recognize the “falsehoods of racecraft that are made in everyday life, in order to work out how to unmake them. Once we Americans can learn to see them for what they are, we can make sense of our past therefore of our present” (p. 74). Ultimately, Fields and Fields (2014)

assert that to eradicate racecraft from the material aspects of our American lives, we must begin with the unravelling of the threads with which it is interwoven.

Everyday Racism

Everyday racism is experiencing racism every day. Lewis (2003) stated that “the social production and reproduction of race today is accomplished under different conditions” (p. 286), such as educational hardships. Educational hardships are rooted in the foundation of everyday racism. Essed (1991) stated that “racism permeates all levels of the social order” (p. 132), especially in education. Educational inequity can include a wide range of oppressive mechanisms experienced in school that result in student oppression, such as a racial divide, discrimination, or unequal distribution of academic resources impeding a student’s academic success. In order for all students to experience equity in schooling, systems must ensure that each student has the support needed for their academic success and that resources and opportunities are equal for success of all students.

Black females in America face an array of impediments in their efforts to succeed socially and academically. Social hardship happens because of oppressive social conditions such as racism. Key contributors of social hardships are racism/classism and sexism. These structures are interconnected to social injustices negatively shaping the lives of Black females. Interlocking systems applied to a marginalized group, such as Black females, create overlapping systems, such as intersectional paradigms, and produce racial inequality, which perpetuates racialized trauma (Simmons, 2015).

Research shows that Black females experience dual layers of subjugation, psychic trauma they inherited that was committed against the Black community, and state-

sponsored racism and White supremacy. State-sponsored racism and White supremacy later turned into institutionalized racism therefore, unleashing a major crisis for Black girls and women in America (Simmons, 2015). Examples of institutionalized racism that impact Black poverty and, living in low-income urban communities, which exposes Black females at an early age to violence, abuse, and drug-infested environments with high crime. These conditions lead to poor housing conditions, hazardous environments, pollution, poor health, and being vulnerable to mental and physical health problems (Kozol, 1991). These are the ongoing traumatic issues that some Black girls and women experience, which are issues they bring into the classroom. The concept of everyday racism illuminates the systemic nature of racism.

Lewis (2003) stated that “racialization is an ongoing process that takes place continually at both macro- and microlevels and involves questions of who belongs where, what categories mean, and what effect they have on people’s life chances and opportunities” (p. 285). Racialized-gendered power hierarchies are what Essed (1991) stated are augmented and constructed through normalizing day-to-day practices, such as “jokes, storytelling, generalizations, or even so-called compliments. These practices can be said to be ‘innocent,’ ‘insignificant,’ or ‘just for fun,” (p. 183). However, when they are consistently repeated, they become “culturally normalized and end up functioning as systematic discrimination against minorities such as Black females, which reinforces majority privilege” (p. 183).

Racial and ethnic discrimination against Black females is still widespread in America. In our public dialogue, there is a bias to disguise the commonality of racism in the everyday lives of Black females. Racism is a system and structure for which the ideology of race provides a rationale. Essed (1991) said that racism as an ideology is present in everyday activities such as schooling and serves to cement and unify the ideological unity of the White group. Likewise,

Fields and Fields (2014) posit the “ideas of racecraft are pieced together in the ordinary course of everyday doing. Along the way, they intertwine with ideas that shape other aspects of American social life” (p. 25). Racism as a social process implies that structures and ideologies of racism are recurrently reinforced and reproduced through a paradox, a complex of attitudes (prejudice) and actions (discriminations). Discrimination in various forms burdens the everyday lives of Black females. Everyday discrimination of Black women can be seen in the form of everyday racism and sexism. This is a concept that shows how a racial hierarchy controls the way organizations are structured and how racialized-gendered power hierarchies are reinforced.

Lewis (2003) states that, to understand “contemporary production and reproduction of racial ideology and racial structures, we must look to the day-to-day events and arenas where ideologies and structures are lived out” (p. 284). A parallel view of racial formation is the process by which social, political, and economic forces determine the importance of the racial categories by which they are shaped. Essed (1991) contends that racism operates as an ideology at two levels: “Racism operates at the level of daily actions and their interpretation and at another level in the refusal to acknowledge racism or to take responsibility for it” (p. 44).

Therefore, racism destructively invents race as a category for division, hence as a system of analysis. The system is conveyed in day-to-day life that under certain circumstances people combat against the pressures to comply to the system. Everyday racism is an interdisciplinary theory that approaches the problem of racism through concepts introduced in various paradigms. With this approach as a foundation to the discussion, Essed (1991) proclaims the study of everyday racism is situated in four

theoretical areas: (a) structural approaches to racism that deals with questions of power and oppression, (b) concerns focused on the impact of Black women regarding gender and class and experiences of racism, (c) sociology that deals with the meaning of social reality and relations between macro-structures and micro-processes, and (d) deals with questions concerning the experience and social cognition. Racism as it pertains to social reality is stimulated by symbolic interactionism. The notion of day-to-day racial experiences of Black females brings to light the fundamental attributes of racism.

The day-to-day realities of racism in the lives of women do not usually receive much attention in politics, legal systems, or societal narratives. Lewis (2003) stated that “although the idea that race is a social construction is widely accepted, the reality of race in daily life has received too little attention” (p. 301). Essed (1991) stated racial structures do not exist outside of agents because they are conceived by the agent; nonetheless, definitive practices are by characterization racist only when initiated by present structures of systems of inequality and racism. According to Essed (1991), “Macro dimensions then view racism as a structural system of inequality and a historical process both produced and reproduced through an everyday practice” (p. 39). Day-to-day racial experiences of Black women can have entrenched unfavorable impacts on one’s physical and mental health. When experiences are perpetual, day-to-day injustices, including several oppressive systems of classism, discrimination, as well as gendered racism, it becomes extremely hard to recognize and can therefore be difficult to counteract. Black women are marginalized because of their gender, class, and ethnicity. Critical theories, such as critical race feminism, intersectionality, and Black feminist thought, shed light on racialized structures and encourages a pivotal shift to recognize and combat Black women oppression.

Theoretical Framework

The primary use of a theoretical framework in a research study is to view, present, and describe the concepts that make clear the research problem and why it is being studied. Esposito and Evans-Winters (2021) explained that a theoretical framework provides some indication of how the researcher presents and views the research problem. In this theoretical framework, I seek to view, present, and describe a problem concerning Black women who experience oppression in education. Additionally, I utilize intersectionality and critical race feminism (ICRF) as an integrated theory ICRF specific to studying the intersections of racism/classism and sexism.

Critical Race Feminism

First, the theory of critical race feminism (CRF) will be utilized in this research study as a method for racial and gender intervention to overcome oppression. This theory emerged as a cultural and legal context in feminist critical discourse, therefore, CRF “draws from feminism and constitutes a race intervention in a feminist discourse analysis and embraces feminism’s emphasis on gender oppression, within a system of patriarchy” (Wing, 2000, p. 6). Today, the theory of CRF is commonly used as a race intervention method to reduce ethnic disparities by investigating interconnected systems of oppression occurring in the lives of Black women. The development of CRF originated from a law professor Richard Delgado, who coined the term in 1995 in a literary collection called *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*. Wing (2020) states that “CRF derives from the intertwining of three jurisprudential movements: (1) critical legal studies (CLS), (2) critical race theory (CRT), and (3) feminist jurisprudence/ womanist theory” (p. 2). CLS, CRT, and feminist jurisprudence/womanism are three colorful strands of theory that are

often researched to find viable solutions to assist Black women and women of color in overcoming oppression.

Intersectionality

Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality. This theory introduced concepts of intersections into legal discourse. The operational definition of intersectionality draws on the interwoven nature of social categorizations as applied to a group of people regarded as the overlapping systems of discrimination. Categories such as race/ethnicity, sex, and class are discriminatory systems that are interdependent in nature. After Crenshaw popularized descriptive term, it was broadly accepted as it revealed the concept of oppression as simultaneous and interlocking. The term draws on the notion that oppressions are not suffered separately but rather as a single, synthesized experience (Smith, 2014). Black feminist scholar Hill-Collins (1990) refined the theory of intersectionality, suggesting that the effects of various oppressions, such as racism, sexism, and classism, cannot be detached because they are also experienced as interlocking systems of oppression. Crenshaw (1991) expressed the term intersectionality to describe diverse ways in which gender and race/ethnicity interact to shape Black women's life experiences. Their experiences occur as multilayered oppressions, therefore creating different obstacles that disempower them.

Smith (2014) described the term intersectionality to draw on the notion that oppressions are not suffered separately but rather as a single, synthesized experience. Intersectionality indicates that the experiences of Black women are never occurring because of one single system of oppression, but are constantly intersecting, resulting in multidimensional effects of structural adverse circumstances. Therefore, I utilized intersectionality as a theoretical framework to bring forth an understanding that Black women suffer from constantly intersecting oppressions that

occur simultaneously in an interlocked system, thus resulting in a catastrophic multidimensional effect.

Integrating Intersectionality and CRF as ICRF

CRF and intersectionality are both viable theories to investigate and challenge ethnicity and gender issues. CRF was designed to make use of the foundation of feminism and critical race theory. Intersectionality was developed to simultaneously address adverse circumstances and discrimination and bring forward awareness of specific interlocking systems to help Black females resist oppression. CRF asserts that, despite the heterogeneity of Black females, their experiences are distinct from White women's and Black men's experiences. As women, Black and White females share some experience of common oppression as women/females. As Black females, they also share some experience with Black males as Black people in a racist society. Oppression can be challenged when unique experiences are recognized and distinctive. Intertwining intersectionality helps to identify and challenge unique experiences specific to marginalized Black females and analyze systems of oppression with the intent of undoing those systems at various levels and across domains of society. Integrating both critical theories can be utilized to understand various ways oppressions work together in creating societal injustices, such as socioeconomic and educational discrimination.

Integrating CRF and intersectionality as a theoretical framework can be a call to Black female scholars to advocate on behalf of Black females. As integrated theories, they are relevant to comprehending the ways in which identity-based systems and structures of oppression are interlinked, overlap, and can alter one another. For example, Black females with disabilities in schools, Buckles and Ives-Ruble (2022) stated in a

Center for American Progress report that they “experience substantial barriers in the education system such as disproportionate discipline, harsh punishments and treatment including seclusion and restraint as well as insufficient attention” (p. 1). These barriers jeopardize their ability to stay in school and succeed.

The consequences are “frequent absences, low attainment levels, lack of opportunities to pursue higher education and possible unemployment and poverty later on in life” (Buckles & Ives-Ruble, 2022, p. 1). Disability issues present characteristics that cannot be completely understood or challenged within CRF or intersectionality frameworks alone. However, ICRF emphasize intersection of race/ethnicity/class and gender. ICRF can help to better understand and challenge oppression of marginalized groups and illuminate the compounds of discrimination so that people in those marginalized groups can understand their position in the U.S. in order to counteract oppression. ICRF can have a synergistic relationship to counteracting oppression and can provide a critical analysis on the intersections and the multidimensional variable experiences of Black females. ICRF can produce important practices and new knowledge and be utilized to “fully understand the situation of Black women that requires not only looking at their racial identity and their gender identity but also exploring the intersection of these identities” (Wing, 2020, p. 4). Consequently, ICRF can help to construct and legitimate counter stories that amplify the voices of Black females.

Conclusion

This corrosive system of racism through racecraft permeate education at every level of schooling. Solomon and Rankin (2019) argued the need to reduce racial disparities in education and that there is a suffocating intrusion of educational inequities in the lives of Black Americans, especially Black females. The sorcery of race is used as a means to disadvantage Black females

in education. Black girls and women have historically faced a host of impediments in their efforts to succeed in U.S education. They may experience racialized structures in education which can leave them as casualties of multidimensional oppression. Identities, such as ethnicity, gender, and class, and other characteristics, such as culture, language, and religion places Black women on the margins of society. Black women have various identities in which they find meaning and with which they identify. The identities of Black women make up characteristics that can shape how they experience everyday life therefore having to navigate multiple identities and maneuver through racialized structures every day. These identities can oftentimes decide the magnitude in which a woman may be afforded opportunities that cause navigating institutions, such as school, and gaining access to resources can be extremely challenging.

When structures create barriers to accessing resources based on distinguishing identity markers, it can make life difficult. Therefore, it is important for educational researchers to study the racialized structures in schooling and foundational socioeconomic experiences of individuals in order to help find solutions to eradicate oppression. Black women's stories and narratives offer a peculiar awareness of the interwoven patterns of oppression that contributes to their marginalization, and also how they experience gender discrimination, sexuality, and race/ethnicity, which also spreads into their educational experience. In order to transform Black female oppressive experience in society as well as in school, teachers, administrators, politicians, political advisors, policymakers, and educators must realize the prevalence of racism and poverty in the lives of Black women by learning about Black women's background, their history, and their specific social conditions.

Chapter 2: Black Girlhood Interruptions: Erasing Childhood Innocence

Punishments and reprimands were a hallmark of my schooling experiences. They started in primary school when teachers labeled my behavior as impolite, misbehaving, defiant, or unladylike. In elementary school, I was expected to have a certain set of knowledge about acceptable communication and appropriate behavior before I actually learned them. According to Armstrong and Fukami (2009), elementary school is where children learn appropriate communication and acceptable behavior. Yet I was reprimanded by my teachers for normal childhood behavior. For example, in the second grade, there was a boy who liked to sit next to me in class. Every day, I complained to the teacher about him sitting next to me. I didn't want to sit next to this particular kid because it was hard for me to do my work. The teacher ignored my requests. One day, the boy sat next to me as usual, and I told the boy he could not sit by me because he stinks. The teacher overheard what I said to the boy and yelled, "Kim, you know better than to say hurtful things! That was very impolite. We need to call your mother!" She said I needed to be punished for my behavior. In the education system, "the perception of Black girls as less innocent may contribute to harsher punishment by educators" (Epstein et al., 2017, p. 1).

What I just described is considered normal childhood behavior. However, for Black girls like me, the behavior is considered punishable whereas for White girls they are considered normal (Epstein et al., 2017). There is an expectation that Black girls should have a certain level of knowledge before learning. The notion is that they are supposed to "know better." Morris (2016) stated that the assignment of more adultlike characteristics to the behavior and expressions of Black girls can be considered a form of age compression.

Interruption: Adulthood

Frequently, Black girls are perceived by adults to be older, more advanced, and more

independent for their age than White girls; therefore, they are treated as miniature adults. This perception perpetuates discrimination in the school system (Epstein et al., 2017). These illustrations are examples of adultification. Adultification is a term used to refer to “the perception of Black girls as less innocent and more adultlike than White girls of the same age,” or the process of situating Black girls in role performances that exceed their age and are thus developmentally inappropriate (Epstein et al., 2017, p. 1). Teachers, parents, and law enforcement officials usually misperceive Black girls as more adultlike and less innocent than White girls and are, therefore, less protective, and more punitive of Black girls.

For instance, one day, my mom and I were headed to pick up her friend and then go to church. My mom was driving, and instead of sitting in the front passenger seat, I sat in the back. As we were getting off the exit, we were pulled over by the police. The police officer walked up to the driver side window and asked my mother if she knew why she was being pulled over. My mother said, “No. May I ask what the problem is, officer?”

The officer said, “You were going a little over the speed limit, and I noticed this young lady sitting in the back seat with no seatbelt on.” My mom replied, “Okay?” The officer said, “Ma’am, is this your daughter sitting back there?” My mom replied, “Yes.” He said, “Well, how old is she because I can’t tell? “She seems old enough.” My mom asked, “Old enough for what? She’s 17. Is there a problem?” The officer said, “If your daughter was older than 18, then she doesn’t have to wear a seat belt in the back. But if she is not, then I can give you a ticket for her not wearing a seat belt.” My mom questioned the officer, saying, “She has to wear a seatbelt in the backseat?” The police officer said, “YES!” Then he asked my mom for her license and registration.

This is an example of a law enforcement official being unable to identify my age and associating my appearance as more adultlike, therefore, disparities of Black girls occur in public systems concerning stereotypes. Oftentimes, “disparate treatment of Black girls occurs in education and with law enforcement such as implicit bias that causes harm and negative outcomes” (Epstein et al., 2017, p. 1). A report in 2017 showed that adults in the U.S. view Black girls as less innocent and more adultlike than White girls (Epstein et al., 2017). This perspective categorizes Black girls as loud, defiant, disruptive, dominating, and aggressive for behaviors that are common and age- appropriate (Morris, 2016). This groundbreaking report confirms that I am not alone in this experience of being viewed as less innocent and more adultlike. When innocence is the essence of childhood, and society denies Black girls their innocence, their entire girlhood is interrupted.

Epstein et al. (2017) stated that the “notion of childhood is a social construct one that is informed by race, among other factors” (p. 2). According to Garlen (2018), the idea of childhood innocence emerged in the U.S. in the nineteenth century as an exclusionary social practice and regulates race relations by producing a particular childhood that perpetuates White supremacy. Garlen analyzed the social tensions and emotional investments that shaped concepts of childhood, which define who is entitled to leniency. Benefits of childhood innocence come before the process of learning. Due to societal negative views on Black girls, they aren’t inheriting the benefits of childhood innocence. Their childhood innocence is being erased. Abuse is another thing that erases Black girl’s innocence. According to the National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community (2018) report, one in four Black girls will experience sexual abuse by the age of 18. While processing trauma, their behavior may appear as a malicious or intentional youth transgression instead of being seen as an immature reaction, and

in turn, they are suspended or expelled from school (Epstein et al., 2017). Black girls who are traumatized need support and counseling intervention for their behavior.

In schools, some emotions and expression are marked Whites only. The expectation for Black girls is to deal with trauma as miniature adults by living life under pressure and dealing with emotional struggles with little or no support on how to process trauma. For instance, as a little girl, I spent a couple of summers visiting my grandparents in Mississippi. My grandpa Green was an ex-soldier who had fought in the Vietnam War, and my grandma Green had been a houseworker and a nanny for a White family. Most of our family reunions were at my grandparents' house. Family reunions are where I would meet a lot of family members for the first time, playing outdoor games, listening to music, and eating food, especially catfish. One day, my mother received a phone call about my grandpa Green.

I will never forget the look on her face when she took the call. I could see the devastation, and I could feel brokenness in my heart and in my soul. I felt as if I were a soldier finding out earth-shattering news about a comrade. My grandpa had been found dead of a heart attack in his car on the side of the road. He had died alone. Shortly after his passing, my grandma Green suffered from diabetes, and gangrene settled into her feet and legs. Shortly after the diagnosis, she passed away. Processing the loss of my grandparents was earth-shattering. In school, I informed my teachers that my had grandparents passed away. This information circled around the school to other teachers and administrators in the building. One teacher's response was very apathetic.

She said, "Kim, I heard that you lost your grandparents. How old were they?" I said, "I think around 64 and 63 years old". She asked, "Were they sick or something?" I replied, "I think so, but I'm not sure." She said, "oh" and then proceeds with telling us to

grab our books, pencil, and paper and began the lesson. I was not offered counseling, and I was not allowed personal time to grieve. The notion was for me to accept the loss and move on. This is an illustration of when I felt I was treated as a miniature adult instead of a child. This is an example of adultification. The moral of the story illustrated above is to bite the bullet.

Bite the bullet is an idiom used when soldiers wounded in battle were given a bullet to bite to brace themselves against painful surgery without having any anesthesia (Kipling, 1891). In this narrative, I am a soldier. My wounds are internalized multidimensional oppressive experiences that impacted me emotionally and psychologically. Harris-Perry (2011) stated that Black girls' psychological, internal, and emotional struggles are inherently political, with the intersections of race, class, and gender playing a key role. Bullets to bite to brace myself are forms of trauma as I experienced the loss of family members.

Method

Processing trauma is painful surgery in order to fix my invisible wounds. Needing anesthesia in my story is a metaphor for needing counseling support services or other methods of intervention for dealing with the loss of loved ones, which my teachers did not offer me. By examining the pathology of various oppressions through the lens of intersectionality, I apply a narrative discourse analysis and explore my own memories of my Black girlhood experiences. Intersectionality is a critical component in acknowledging intersecting oppressions, such as race, gender, and class, in the personal lived experiences of Black girls (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Hill-Collins, 1991; Hill-Collins & Bilge 2016, 2020; Smith, 2014).

In the context of Black feminism and understanding their struggles, intersectionality is defined as the myriad ways in which gender and race connect, interact, and shape various dimensions of Black girlhood experience (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Hill-Collins, 1991). This is

essential to acknowledging the oppression of Black females and supporting shared narratives of oppression. To share cultural, memorable narratives informed by the emancipatory impulse that characterizes storytelling (Brown, 2009), an interpretive method of autoethnography is useful in this work. According to Ellis et al. (2011), autoethnography systematically examines a person's cultural experience and encourages them to utilize tenets of ethnography and autobiography.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) posited that autoethnographic work is a form of intervention for those who are denied a voice to speak. To deny one's voice is a form of exclusion through racism. McArthur and Muhammad (2017) stated Black girls are victims of exclusionary practices and are often casualties of "racialized gender identities" (p. 63). The very nature of a Black girls' multiple identities and cultural experiences can be unveiled through their voices, which can create purposeful truths about oppression, such as socioeconomic hardships and societal pressures. Black girlhood is defined as the "representations, the memories and lived experiences of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female" (Brown, 2009, p. x). The study of Black girlhood introduces theoretical ways to examine the history of childhood and youth in a way that demonstrates internal and external material conditions.

Interruption: War

My granny Ruby was a beautiful gem just like her name. She was the mother of my Grandma Pearl. She was a tall, slender, actively fit, strong Black female with satiny silk Black and silver hair swooshed up in a French twist. Even in her mid-70s, she was fantastically fit. She was the matriarch, the pillar, the glue that held my family together for many years. She was well known and highly respected in our community. She was valued as a powerful Black woman who helped parents with babysitting and disciplining their children. Like the gorgeous gem that shared her name, my great granny Ruby was

also very gifted and talented especially with fishing. Good times with my granny was when we went fishing. My granny took me and my siblings fishing quite often. Granny picked us up early in the morning on Saturdays around 6:00am. We packed our lunches of Vienna sausages, cheese, and crackers and loaded up our fishing poles, rods, and reels in her little blue station wagon. We checked our tackle boxes to make sure all of the proper fishing tools needed for the day were ready. Before we arrived at the lake, we stopped by a bait shop to get fresh worms.

Nightcrawlers were my granny's favorite fishing bait.

I, however, was terrified of night crawlers because they were big, fat, slimy, very wiggly, and moved extremely fast. When we arrived at the lake, we carried our seating crates and our fishing poles to our favorite fishing spot. Once we were situated on the lake for the next four to five hours, my granny consistently quieted us down and always said that if we talked, we would scare all of the fishes away. Although I was afraid of worms, I loved fishing. Going fishing with my granny, I always caught fish. I caught beautiful blue gills, bass, perch, and catfish. Everyone one of us caught a fish and managed to get it off the hook and into the water bucket. When someone caught a fish, everyone cheered. One of the best times with my granny was after we were done fishing for the day, we would bring all of our bucket of fishes' home. She taught me how to gut them, scale them, and prepare them for cooking. Fresh fried fish was one of my favorite foods as a child. However, one day in the heat of the summer, while I enjoyed a beautiful, bright, serene afternoon with sultry weather during a lively game of kickball with my friends, granny Ruby pulled up in the driveway and walked exhaustedly into our home. Excited to see Granny, I ran in the house and asked, "Can we please go fishin, Granny, pleeeeeeasse?"

She said, "Kim, I'm not feeling well today. But I promise, as soon as I feel better, we're going fishin." Days later, my parents walked me into Granny's cold, dark, and gloomy room. My

gaze swiveled around the room at the bland walls, and the seats closest to Granny's bedside sat empty. Granny Ruby had visibly lost a lot of weight. With shuttering, haltering breaths as she attempted to control her pain, barely speaking with the oxygen cup covering her mouth and nose, she tried to formulate her words. She whispered my name in a small faint voice and waved me to her bedside. Approaching my granny, I smelled bleach wafting from her bed. I grabbed her hand, and she slightly pulled down her oxygen cup, and said, "Kim, I promise. As soon as I get out of this hospital, I'm gon' take you fishin" I nodded my head yes. The look in her gentle, gleaming, gray, cloudy eyes was as if she had just realized that she would never see the sunrise again. Having great breathing difficulties, she hurried and pulled the oxygen mask to her face. My parents quickly walked me out of the room, back into the hallway with the rest of the family, so they could have a private conversation with the doctor. This is the first time as a little girl I didn't feel well in a way that I couldn't describe. The faces of my family members seemed very sad, and their eyes flooded with tears of sorrow. This was more than a regular tummy ache or headache from staying up too late watching my favorite cartoons on the weekend. Deep down inside of my heart, I knew that my great-grandmother was not ever going to take me fishing again. My granny Ruby passed away from cancer shortly after this hospital visit. Losing my granny was very traumatic for me. It felt like a bullet pierced my heart. After this incident, I felt like my girlhood was negatively interrupted. I didn't know how to process the pain of losing my granny. I needed spiritual intervention and counseling.

When processing grief, the expectation from family, teachers, as well as society is to bite the bullet, to heal and move on. My dad really pushed the family into communicating more and having more unity and more family gatherings. Nevertheless, I needed anesthesia to prepare me for painful surgery to fix a little girl's broken heart. My

mom always told me, “Kim, challenges experienced in life must be overcome by spiritual warfare through prayer.” These words echo the Scripture, “for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (King James Bible 2011, Ephesians 6:12).

This saying followed me through the rest of my childhood and womanhood. Little did I know that prayer, perseverance, and knowing my purpose would be my superpower. Sometimes, life can be a war zone. The lives of the oppressed can be situated in the heart of the war. There will be pain and sorrow. There will be stigmatization, characterization, misrepresentation, and misjudgment, but I learned through facing conflict that I am an overcomer. As a child of the Most High and as a Black girl prayer warrior, I’ve always believed that prayer can change things.

My strength and perseverance come from powerful females in my family. My mother taught me how to pray and took me to all of the prayer meetings at church. My aunts reinforced the importance of having a prayer life and took me with them on missionary trips to pray for the sick. My grandmothers always encouraged me to speak positive words and affirmations into my life. Together, the women in my family were the positive reinforcement team I needed to overcome hardship in my Black girlhood and womanhood.

As Black female prayer warriors, we prayed and warred in the spirit against negative forces that tried to interrupt our day-to-day lives. During prayer, we used powerful words to combat personal tests, and trials, and the evils in this world that inflict harm, pain, and struggles on our families and in our community. This is to combat social injustices and to resist oppression. The women in my family learned the art of prayer and positivity to persevere in times of tribulation, knew their purpose, and passed down the legacy of prayer and positivity to

me. They always encouraged me to speak goodness into my life and inspired me to know who I am and my purpose.

Today, as a Black woman prayer warrior (McKeever, 2012), I continue the legacy with a greater understanding of who I am, why I experience oppression, and how to combat it. I have learned the meaning of life struggles in my Black girlhood experience. Through positive reinforcement in my thoughts, attitude, and words interconnected to a powerful prayer, I have learned that I can change the course of my life for the better. I do this as an act of agency and as an act of resilience for liberation from adversity (Simmons, 2015). As a little girl, I enjoyed going to church with my parents. I was raised in the Apostolic faith. The Apostolic faith is centered on a born-again experience, the teaching of holiness and sanctification through baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit (Casselberry, 2017). As a Christian, remaining on the battlefield and receiving healing from a wound could also symbolize a baptism, a spiritual cleansing available through Christ Jesus.

That is to say, if one wants to receive their salvation from sin and evil, they will willingly go through a process of repentance, baptism for salvation. Johnson (2013) listed steps of repentance as (a) asking God for forgiveness from all sins, such as mistreating people, having bad habits or addictions, or doing bad things in the past; (b) actively beginning the process of turning from those sinful ways; (c) acknowledging Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and turning to God in faith that all of your sins may be forgiven and finally; and (d) being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Spirit (King James Bible 2011, Matthew 18:19). I experienced this process in my Black girlhood at the age of 8.

This was an important step in the faith as my parents were believers as well as being elders, preachers, and singers at our home church. One reason why I thought I was ready for this process is because I was interested in singing in the youth choir. Singing was a very important legacy of my family. There was a rule that unless one was baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit, they could not participate in a ministry, not even join the choir. My life changed and was interrupted in a positive way once I received my salvation. I attended church several times a week. When I was baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit, my parents had greater expectations and responsibilities for me that I had to manage daily. I was encouraged to have a good attitude, be well-mannered and respectful, and live a holy life through having a good behavior. This included reading my Bible every day and going to Bible class, participating in Sunday school, (Vondey, 2020), praying at prayer services, and traveling with the missionary workers to hospitals and convalescent homes to pray for the ill. Some of the new expectations and responsibilities made me feel like a miniature adult. Nevertheless, after this experience, I felt that I had a greater insight to the meaning of life and death. I felt a burden to carry on my parents' legacy as a singer and as a minister. I experienced new levels of consciousness and obtained a better sense of right and wrong. This transformation did not reinforce a life of joy, prosperity, and evolving happiness, however, this new experience brought meaning to prayer,

perseverance, and purpose. It also brought hope, awareness, peace, strength, wisdom, and an understanding of spirituality. After the process of baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit, I was also endowed with a gift as a prophetic dreamer. As a girl, I talked to my mom about my dreams, and she told me that dreams can be a spiritual gift, a form of communication, from God. Oftentimes my dad interpreted the dreams for me. This spiritual gift, along with prayer and perseverance, was my Black girl superpower. Achieving my salvation forever transformed my

Black girlhood experience. After my granny passed away, my parents divorced. My Black girlhood became interrupted again, and my life became extremely difficult. With my mom during the week, I lived a Christian faith-based lifestyle. With my dad during the weekends, my faith-based life was uniquely different.

The central tenets to living a Christian faith-based lifestyle for me consisted of aligning my life with the word of God, the Bible. I aimed to have a lifestyle of love, kindness, compassion, generosity, and forgiveness (Johnson, 2013), which echoed the Bible (King James Bible, 2011, Galatians 5:22-25) scripture that says: “but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” I thrived to have a lifestyle where I did not adopt the ways of the world. Praying to God in Jesus’ name, attending church, participating, actively in ministry, and following the orders of the leader of the church is also a Christian faith-based lifestyle (Casselberry, 2017). Today, as a Black woman minister who has transitioned from the Apostolic faith and crossed over to the Hebrew Israelite belief as a Sabbath keeper and a Torah follower, I recognize that throughout my girlhood experience I was spiritually connected to the Most High through my personal relationship with Him. Nevertheless, my Black girlhood was once again interrupted with dual religions that I call double conversions.

Interruption: Double Conversions

Religion was a challenge for me as a little girl. My father’s conversion from Christianity to the Islamic faith brought many challenges. While with my father, I lived an Islamic faith- based lifestyle. Praying to Allah and participating in Bible study and

Quran study sessions was a daily ritual. This was a difficult time for me because there was conflict between my father's belief as a Muslim and my mother's belief as a Christian. Although my religious foundation was that of the Apostolic faith, I struggled to balance my beliefs. Major changes occurred with my day-to-day living. When my father converted to a Muslim, my eating habits changed. My praying habits and behavioral habits changed and reflected that of a Black Muslim girl. According to McArthur and Muhammad (2017), "Religion, especially understanding the Christian/Muslim binary in the United States, adds to the oppressive experiences of Black women and girl Muslims" (p. 65). The remaining teen life experiences for me concerning double conversions was a series of shocking moments. For instance, the first shocking moment for me was when my father taught my siblings and me several of things concerning Bible history. Things that we had not heard of such as the Garden of Eden was located in Africa. This was an astounding moment because the location of the Garden of Eden was never discussed during Sunday school or during church service.

Next, my dad said that the Biblical characters of Adam and Eve were Black people from Africa. This was very eye-opening because all the images and illustrations in our children's Bible showed Adam and Eve as a White couple with blond hair and blue eyes. After that, my dad said that Black people are from Africa, we were created to live on this earth first, and all races of people came from Black people. This was an incomprehensible, hugely shocking moment for me because I was always taught in Sunday school that Black people were not from Africa, we are not Africans, and no one really knows who we are or where we came from, but the belief is that we were the Gentile converts, a group of righteous people spoken of in the Bible who were not Hebrew or Jews (Salkin, 2008). In my Sunday school class, as well as in Christian learning, race or ethnicity was rarely discussed.

Next, my dad said that we were God's chosen people who had unique powers due to our connection with the Most High and the importance of melanin in our skin. He taught me that my spirituality was connected to my culture, and the color of my skin and my spiritual DNA was connected to the Most High. This was very mystifying because I had never heard of Black people having unique powers nor had anyone around me ever talked about melanin (York, 1995). The final shocking moment for me was mind-blowing, an experience that was incomprehensible. This piece of information totally changed my religious perspectives, always sparking my curiosity to want to learn the truth about Black people. My dad told me that Jesus was a Black man, a prophet, not God. He said that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was Black too. I was in awe of this information, but at the same time, I was afraid to talk about it. I could not ask questions.

All of these things that I learned were almost the exact opposite of what I was taught as a Christian of the Apostolic faith. For instance, learning about Christianity, I was taught that Jesus was a Jew, White in color. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was White too. Jesus is the physical manifestation of God, and everybody must be born again with baptism and the Holy Spirit in order to make it to heaven. The Christian faith is not about color, culture, or background. It is about loving everyone as Christ loved the church and treating everyone with respect because God loves everyone. This was my mother's view. From my father, I learned of institutional structures in society that caused Black people to be oppressed. When it came to learning of war pertaining to White supremacy (Solomon & Rankin, 2019), slavery, Jim Crow, the KKK (Packard, 2003), Civil Rights, Black Liberation movements, and prominent Black historical leaders (Asante, 2010), my father was my Black history teacher. This was a critical time of learning for me, but it was also

life-altering and oppressive due to this conflict of religion. The information I gained from my father was contrary to the learning I received in school.

I did not know how to process a dual-layered religious life as a believer in both Christianity and Islam. Within myself, I was experiencing an internal war, a conflict with intersecting identities. This was another moment that my Black girlhood was interrupted. Double conversions of religious identities caused another layer of oppression. The double conversion concept reminds me of the double consciousness concept that DuBois (1903) introduced. He spoke of an internal war in one dark body, an inner battle of two thoughts and two souls, and noted that Black Americans live with two conflicting identities that cannot, in a racist society, be reconciled. During this point in my Black girlhood, I felt the internal war, the inner battle, the conflict of religious identities. When viewing the myriad ways Black girls experience discrimination while navigating multiple identities, it is important to understand that living with several conflicting identities can make life more difficult (Price-Dennis et al., 2017). In regard to Black girls navigating multiple identities of race, class, and gender and acknowledging religion brings a manifestation of prejudices, McArthur and Muhammad (2017) stated that “Blacks, women, and specifically Black Muslim women, are historically subordinated in the United States” (p. 63).

For instance, during the transition between conflicting identities, I ate pork when I was with my mom, but I was not allowed to eat pork when I was with my dad. I celebrated holidays with my mom, but I could not celebrate most holidays with my dad. As a Black girl, I had a daily life experience of trying to navigate being a girl, Black, American, Christian, and Muslim. This process continued well into my early adulthood years. Ultimately, I had to bite the bullet and just deal with change the best way that I knew how in order to survive. As a child, wounds were

bullets of dual religions. I was emotionally and mentally confused. I needed counseling, which is anesthesia to numb my wounds to prepare for a painful surgery. I felt torn between Islam and Christianity. Choosing one religion over the other or totally separating myself from religion was a choice I eventually had to make in order to stop confusion and the stress of double belonging.

The ideas from religion are that Black women were in the most subservient, submissive roles and did not have a lot of power. It was discouraging to be told that the purposes of Black women were to reproduce, obey the husband's instructions, be a homemaker, and be silent. Women had no real place in leadership, neither did they make any contributions during religious study sessions. Learning of the roles of Black women in our culture lead to a moment where I felt I had no voice and would have to be silent. It wasn't until my adulthood when family members and coworkers who collected ancient Egyptian artifacts started to inform me that my appearance and behavior reflected that of Egyptian queens. As an adult, researching Black women in ancient history, and I found a lot of powerful Black queens in history who are rarely recognized in my culture or in my religion.

For instance, the Warrior Queen Candace of Meroe from Sudan in North Africa contributed to the rise in the Kingdom of Kush, in 332 B.C. (Nanjira, 2010). She was known for leading an army while riding an elephant and for combatting the invasion from Alexander the Great and a Roman army. With her fierce warrior strategies, she caused Alexander the Great to retreat from her territory. Queen Nefertiti 14th century B.C. Egypt was known for her beauty and her powerful influence of introducing a new religion and worship. Speculation remains that she was elevated in power equal to her husband a

Pharoah (Lange, 2009). This information I obtained by having a curiosity about the history of Black women. In the earlier times of my Black womanhood, I was told quite frequently by friends and family members how my appearance resembled Egyptian queens. Thus, for example, one summer, I went to visit my uncle and his new wife. Upon meeting her for the first time, she gave me a tour of their new house and told me that she collects Egyptian statues and relics. She showed me several Egyptian queens who face resembled my face. She said, “Kim, your ancestors have to be queens of Egypt, your face looks just like most of my figurines.” One day, I was going to pick up my new identification card when I was working at Georgia State University and the worker asked for my driver’s license so that he could process the request for my ID card. He looked at my photo on my driver’s license and looked up at me like he had seen a ghost. He said, “ma’am you ever looked into your African ancestry? You look just like Queen Nefertiti. I bet somewhere down the line you’ll find she was one of your ancestors.” These experiences sparked my interest to research Black queens of Africa. Through my individual desires to learn about powerful Black women in history and seek empowerment to uplift myself, I started to search historical stories of the women in Africa. I wish I would have known of this information as a girl. I believe that I may not have struggled as much with confidence. I believe this would have made a difference in my self-esteem, an overall uplift of knowing that Black women weren’t always enslaved and oppressed. Instead, all over the world there were powerful Black women who were valued and respected.

Interruption: Educational Oppression

Black girls face a host of obstacles in their efforts to thrive socially, economically, and academically. Oftentimes, they are victims of multi-dimensional interlocking oppression, such as race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Hill-Collins, 2000, 2002; Hill-Collins & Bilge, 2020;

Smith, 2014). As a result, the interlocking circumstances create unfavorable and hostile social and schooling environments that cause Black girls to negotiate their identities and navigate multiple oppressions. I was 10 years old in the fifth grade when I started getting into trouble at school. In a short span of time, my great granny was no longer in my life, and my parents divorced. Years later, my dad had another child, my mother re-married, and I was still struggling with dual religious identities. When my mother got remarried, we moved across town and changed neighborhoods, friends, and schools. Drastic changes for Black girls such as poverty and changing schools, can make life difficult (Evans-Winters, 2005).

As a child, I could not express this overwhelming change. Reflecting back on my elementary and middle school experiences, it seems I was always in trouble at school. For instance, most of my fifth-grade schooling, I was in the principal's office. "Ms. Dix-Son!" yelled Mr. K, jumping up from his desk. "This is very unladylike!" Get out of my class! Go to the principal's office NOW! Compared to Latina or White peers, Black girls are more likely to be reprimanded for being "unladylike" by their teacher (Morris, 2016), which was certainly my experience. Mr. K had intercepted a note that my best friend and I were passing back and forth in the classroom. After taking the notes from us, Mr. K quietly walked backed to his desk, sat down, and read the note that said, "I hate Mr. K's class. It's soooooo boring." His face turned red. Mr. K had seen me pass the note and assumed that I was the ringleader of this heinous crime as the note writer. He jumped up from his desk like he had seen a ghost and interrupted the class saying, "As a matter of a fact, I'm going to walk you down to the principal's office myself so we can call your mother!!" For Black girls attending a predominately urban Black public school with

White teachers, there is a revolving door; students are constantly in and out of the classroom and in the principal's office getting reprimanded or suspended (Evans-Winters, 2005). For the rest of my elementary school and middle school experience, I got into a lot of school fights. My actions were a response to being bullied by other kids. I ultimately ended up experiencing in-school detentions, and suspensions, and spent a great portion of my schooling in the principal's office (Morris, 2016).

Interruption: Racism and Gender

I was a Black female freshman—petite, quiet, brilliant, creative, gifted, and full of life and light in a seemingly diverse urban public high school with predominately White teachers. I was extremely challenged in learning algebra. I was one of the only Black girls in the classroom along with a handful of Black boys. Ms. Porter asked the class a question, “Can anyone tell me the answer to $x + 12 = -14$? Who wants to come up to the board and do this problem?” She looked around the classroom, and I looked around the classroom. The students' hands on the left side of class went up excitedly, and quite a few students' hands on the right side of the classroom went up. I heard, “Me, me, me, I do, Ms. Porter, ask me.” One of my classmates said to another student, “You went last time. It's someone else's turn.” I was confident that I could solve the equation, but I had reservations about volunteering.

Due to the history of being stereotyped by my teachers, called out, and then shunned, I simply refused to participate in class. Based on my experience in middle school, volunteering to go to the chalk board to solve an equation was a booby-trap. In the past, if I were to correctly solve the problem, I would be called on to solve equations throughout the rest of the semester. Then, I would be harassed by other students to help them with their work as if I were their personal tutor. On the flip side, if I did not solve the problem correctly, I would be picked on by

classmates and labeled dumb, stupid, or slow. In Ms. Porter's class, seconds went past while she looked around the room when all of a sudden, her beady eyes locked on me.

She said, "Well, what about you, Kim?" I said, "But my hand wasn't raised." Ms. Porter then said, "And that's why I'm calling you to the board." I was so frustrated; I felt trapped. In my mind I said, I knew she was going to call on me. What am I going to do? What else can I say? I thought obviously if I didn't raise my hand this meant that I did not want to come to the board to solve the problem. That didn't matter to Ms. Porter.

Whatever she says goes. I knew if I said no, I would be kicked out of class again. Ms. Porter rarely encouraged students unless you were White and smart. I stood up from my desk and began to walk towards her to get the piece of chalk in her hand. Her dark eyes pierced her huge bifocals, looking at me in disgust. I reached out to grab the chalk. I could hear her teeth grinding, with a heavy sigh under her breath. She gave me the cold shoulder. I grabbed the chalk that was in her fingers. Refusing to let go, she gripped it so tight that I had to almost pry it from her White, cold, firm, yet brittle fingers.

It only took me a minute or two to work out the entire equation on the board. After I completed the math problem, I looked back at the class and smiled then handed Ms. Porter the chalk and walked back to my seat quietly. She said, "Hmmm. Well, I don't know how you came up with the answer to this problem doing the work that you did on the board. This is not the way I taught you how to do this problem." She then turned to the class and said, "Kim got lucky this time. Doing this equation her way will not always work. It's better to learn it my way." All of a sudden, my smile turned into a frown. My girlhood pride and happiness turned into sorrow, and my confidence turned into low self-esteem. I knew this was the beginning of my downfall in this class. I felt I could never be

right; I could never win in this class. This was only the beginning of a miserable semester in Ms. Porter's class where my desk was moved outside the classroom door. I spent an entire semester learning algebra in the hallway because I had solved the math problem in the way I had learned.

Evans-Winters (2005) talked about how Black girls are most at risk to experience hostility and backlash in the classroom environment with White teachers. This is an example of Black girl oppression in the classroom. Racism and gender played a factor in my learning experience. Teachers' expectations differ with gender and race and Black female students face various barriers with White classroom teachers (Evans-Winters 2005). Black females in the classroom may be overshadowed and overlooked, often made to feel invisible and excluded, or targeted and hyper-visible. Price-Dennis and Muhammad (2021) said the notion of hypervisibility is attributed to how people are conditioned to see Black girls as needing to be controlled and not human beings needing to be understood. In Ms. Porter's class, depending on her teaching agenda that day, I may experience invisibility or hypervisibility, both notions impacting me in a negative way. Ms. Porter's class was also not the only class where I experienced racism, gender discrimination, invisibility, or hypervisibility. Reflecting today, on my ninth-grade algebra experiences as a Black female educator, I know I was experiencing multiple oppressions in the classroom.

Conclusion

We live in a complicated world of race, class, gender, religion, and other intersectional oppressions that inform and shape the lives of Black girls. Black girls are unique, complex beings with multiple, complex cultural identities (Brown, 2009). Social injustices, such as adultification, stereotyping, and educational oppression, can interrupt Black girls' daily lives and erase their childhood. Black girls should be entitled to the benefits of childhood innocence,

value, and respect and given the same level of compassion that White girls receive. Black girlhood is about Black girls coming to find their voice and expressing their unique experiences (Love, 2019); therefore, storytelling can be a powerful tool for Black girls to exercise voice, agency, and empowerment as both individual and collective expressions of lived experiences. Exploring my own memories of life-altering moments to rediscover my experiences and pure essence of self and voice brought liberation in discussing my personal oppressions. This autoethnography gave me the freedom to talk about the various interruptions I endured in my Black girlhood. Through the power of storytelling, I amplified my voice and expressed my experiences so that readers can see the world through my eyes.

Chapter 3: Black Women at the Crossroads: A Path to Resist Oppression

Reflecting a long history of White supremacy in the US, primary social structures exert manifold oppressions on Black bodies. Black people have historically faced a host of obstacles to their efforts to succeed in US society. Black women experience these oppressions, perhaps in the most complex and concentrated ways, being Black *and* female in a “White supremacist patriarchal capitalist society” (hooks, 2012, p. 79). In US society, Black females experience complex raced, classed, and gendered identities, which add to their oppression (McArthur & Muhammad, 2017). Identities constituted by multiple and sometimes contradicting attributes and role performances situate people on the margins of society in terms of opportunity, at the same time situating them at the center of various forces while herding them into impoverished communities. Once situated in an impoverished community, one has to navigate, negotiate, and challenge multiple systems of oppression in order to gain advancement or prevent further falling in the system.

It seems the only option for Black females living at the crossroads of the margins is to navigate identities constituted by multiple and contradictory attributes while maneuvering through racialized structures to survive. As an example, Gibson (2013) stated that, “a butch lesbian, for example, may experience sexist and heterosexist oppression associated with her femaleness and her homosexuality; that same sexism may also transform her perceived masculinity into a kind of power” (p. 178). Josselson and Harway (2012) further details that navigating consists of maintaining, instead of overcoming, intersecting, overlapping, oftentimes incompatible or colliding dimensions of self-experience. Therefore, a path to agency and willpower for Black females to resist intersectional oppression can be difficult. Exercising agency can be challenging, made all the more difficult by forces related to but not limited to,

patriarchy, racism/classism, and sexism. Consider an example of exercising agency. As a Black woman who experienced sexual assault, I was apprehensive about reporting the crime due to ongoing harassment from the perpetrator as well as the informed hunch that sexism would further injure me by putting the burden of proof on me, while protecting the perpetrator.

For many years, I lived in terror and confusion, eventually convincing myself that the best option was to keep quiet. Developing into a woman experiencing internal conflicts, trauma, anxiety, and an identity crisis placed me on a path to an emotional breakdown. One day, I decided it was time to strategize a way to report this violation. I sought out employment for safety and security. I obtained a job as a 911 dispatcher. This job connected me to law enforcement. This was a difficult decision because Black females experience a long history of police brutality (Ritchie, 2017). I had a long-standing awareness of this history as a person who is Black and female.

Consider a powerful and tragic example from an egregiously long list. In 2003, 12 heavily armed NYPD officers raided and flash grenaded 57-year-old Alberta Spruill, a NYC worker, while she was leaving her house for work one early morning. Officers raided the wrong apartment in search for drugs and guns. Officers handcuffed Alberta as they continuously searched her apartment. She yelled, "I can't breathe." The officers ignored her plea, continued to search, and found nothing. As a result of this incident, Alberta Spruill lost her life during the raid (Rashbaum, 2003). Nonetheless, obtaining a law enforcement job for me brought a sense of security. When my perpetrator got wind of my new job placement, he stopped harassing me. Having a connection to law enforcement, in the state and county that I resided in helped to inform my intervention. It

was through working in law enforcement that I learned of a 7-year statute of limitation on reporting sexual assault for legal action. Some of the benefits of being a 911 operator were receiving counseling services, learning of intervention methods, and being aware of the time limitations of reporting sexual assault incidents. Through this process, I built up enough courage to report the crime to law enforcement so that my case was documented and investigated. This brought self-healing and a feeling of safety and security. Reporting this incident and receiving counseling services also encouraged me to combat internal conflicts and manage my anxiety.

My personal lived experiences encouraged me to speak out against social injustices. My heterosexuality and abled body, infused with my Black femaleness, positioned me in several ways that: (a) My willpower became a viable source of resistance and informed my intervention. (b) Despite the brutality of my experience, my heterosexuality played a factor in acting as a protective element in eventually reporting the crime. (c) My abled body was an important key factor in my ability to strategize a plan to eventually respond to the violation for an investigation, self-healing, safety, and security. (d) My background power, knowledge, and identification with this history played a key factor in motivating my willpower. A disabled Black female, for example, may experience another layer of oppression and a different kind of intervention due to their disabled-ness.

For one, a disability may prevent a person from obtaining a law enforcement job because several forms of psychological testing, strenuous background checks, and assessments are used to evaluate a person's ability to function on the job. Furthermore, one has to have the capability to research and seek out intervention methods, access counseling services, research time limitations, and devise a plan to block the perpetrator's harassment. One would also need intellectual capacity to find the best intervention methods to report and respond to sexual assault.

All of these factors are important to informing one's intervention. Willpower can be individually motivated or performed as a collective. For instance, the willpower of an individual to think and act in ways that shape their life trajectories and experiences is a form of agency (Cole, 2019). Black females face a host of social forces that are indifferent to willpower on its own. Given the interconnected and complex institutions and elements of social structures that work in concert to shape the choices, behavior, thought processes, and experiences of individuals and their life outcomes, Black females may benefit from gathering in groups to perform willpower as a collective. As a collective, Black females can have greater connections to social justice groups, greater access to resources for a larger platform for social justice movements, and a larger voice as a group to speak against social injustices and be heard as a collective.

Historically, when Black women attempted to create forms of community and leading social justice movements, they were met with gender discrimination and sexual harassment. Black females were often overshadowed by men when trying to create forms of resistance. This includes fighting for resources, being taken seriously in leadership roles, sexual harassment and their voices being silenced. As a Black female who transitioned from silence to speech (Davidson, 2017), I obtained a job as an event programmer in a women's resource center that afforded me the opportunity to utilize this platform to host public forums to inform the community of the myriad ways Black females experience violence, harassment, sexual assault, ethnic, and racist disparities in society. During public forums, I share my personal stories of how I continue to survive oppression in hopes that my lived experiences bring healing and liberation to other women who have survived being victims. This is one way that I asserted agency

individually and collectively. This is how I continue to exercise my willpower to resist intersecting oppressions. When we explore systems of oppression and how they disadvantage marginalized groups in our society, we can then recognize multiple ways marginalized, Black Americans experience everyday racism and how it is shaped by both structural dynamics and everyday practices interlaced with classism and sexism.

Fields and Fields (2014) define racism as a double standard based on ancestry that plays out in the most subtle of relationships from language and sumptuary codes to institutional patterns. Racism, classism, and sexism are systems of oppression that rely on and reproduce interrelated structures and cause a person harm. Harm exists as a primary objective of systems of oppression. Black females face unique challenges with race and class inequality in the wider society. Economic insecurity is one of the major hardships that Black females experience (Massey & Denton, 1998; Rothstein, 2017). According to a National Partnership for Women & Families (2018) report, Black females are paid sixty-three cents for every dollar paid to White, non-Hispanic men. Black females receive an annual pay of \$21,698 less than White, non-Hispanic men. According to Taylor (2019), in real dollars, Black females receive on average \$34,000 a year compared to \$53,000 for White males.

Due to sexism, racism, and other impediments that contribute to income inequality Black females and their families may have to choose between resources such as food, health care, housing, or childcare. As a working-class Black female living in an urban community, I experienced economic insecurity such as having no assets, no access to emergency savings, no personal savings, and did not have a retirement account. Month to month, my financial circumstances subjected me to choose between paying for childcare, housing, or food. I could not afford to pay for all monthly expenses. For some Black females living in impoverished

communities with racial segregation, oftentimes they are disproportionately placed in environmental hazards and experience redlining, violence, harassment, and unequal distribution of resources and therefore suffer greater risks for experiencing negative life outcomes (Massey & Denton, 1993; Fields & Fields 2014; Brennan, 2017; Rothstein, 2017; Boss, 2018). For example, according to a National Partnership for Women & Families (2018) report, Black females are more than likely uninsured and three to four times more likely to experience a pregnancy related death than White females. In the same vein, Black females are more likely to experience impediments to obtaining quality health care and are at a greater risk of facing racial discrimination throughout their lives (Sacks, 2019; Golden, 2021). Fields and Fields (2014) argue that “the outcome of deliberate government policy as well as individual actions, provides the material underpinning for many forms of everyday inequality based on racism” (p. 266). This example situates Black females at the crossroads on the margins of society. Oftentimes these dynamics inform life opportunities for Black females as they are structured and allocated in schools and other domains of society such as the workforce, legal system, health care system, and realty markets. When structures create barriers to accessing resources based on distinguishing identity markers, it can make life extremely challenging.

This is an example of intersectional forces that leaves Black women at the crossroads of oppression because forces define, classify, and rank their identity, therefore impacting the everyday lives and life chances of Black females. Harris (2019) brings to light Black females with multiple identities may also code-switch. Adjusting speech, voice, language, posture to avoid confrontation or even dumbing down one’s literacy, downplaying dignity especially during Jim Crow era was to preserve a Black person’s life (Harris, 2019). Depending on the context, today, Black females may code-switch to

emphasize different aspects of their integrated identity as a strategy to maximize opportunities and resources and reduce risks to their overall functioning in society, therefore, it is important for Black females to exercise agency. An essential component of exercising agency is being critically aware of oppression and asserting authority to act against oppression.

Davidson (2017) presents agency in the same vein of role performance. She states that agency is “the ability to act and be seen as an actor” (p. 27) and describes agency as claiming one’s authority such as a birthright. For instance, acting against oppression can be done by taking calculated risks and utilizing a public place as a platform to speak out against social injustices. Davidson (2017) speaks of documented historical incalculable moments that Black women took calculated risks and asserted agency such as Harriet Tubman leading of an insurrection, Mamie Till leaving her son’s casket open, and Shirley Chisolm becoming the first Black females to be elected to congress and the first Black person to run for president on a major primary ticket.

Comparatively, Davidson (2017) discusses undocumented everyday moments in which Black females asserted individual agency in acts of defiance and asserting willpower, claiming subjectivity, and resisting White supremacy in bold, public proclamations as everyday acts of agency. The desire and capability of individual willpower to plan and carry out an act of defiance is connected to one’s self-awareness and mental capacity. Agency for Black women is never simply given: “Nevertheless, as individuals who through talent, social and political networks, and sheer luck they are, at times, able to enact individual agency on a par and even above their White counter parts” (Davidson, 2017, p. 94). The importance of studying the work of racialized structures in the wider society are due to my positionality as a Black woman and utilizing my research to critically reflect on how race and gender can impact a person’s ability to exercise agency. As a Black girl, I lived in an impoverished community with racial segregation,

experienced economic insecurity, attended urban public schools with low quality education, struggled academically, and experienced racial and gender discrimination in school.

As a Black woman, I experienced life and death struggles for survival including ethnic and racial disparity in health care treatment in young adult pregnancy, sexual assault, and other gendered violence. I experienced stereotyping such as being called an angry Black woman, workplace racial and gender discrimination, and racism in school. These forces situated me at the crossroads of multidimensional hardships. These forces were interlocking simultaneous oppressions which made life more difficult to survive. Therefore, I asserted agency by becoming critically conscious of my oppression (Matsuda, 1988). For example, as a junior college student with children, I became conscious of my economic oppression due to experiencing extreme hardship while on welfare. I was simply not bringing in enough economic resources to take care of my family. I sought out strategies to overcome economic insecurity by working several jobs and obtaining school grants which boost my income. This strategy afforded me the opportunity to move out of an impoverished community with racial segregation, redlining, hazardous environments, and violence. These income strategies helped with a deposit on a new house, paid for rent and babysitter costs, and afforded me an opportunity to finish my associate's degrees while building a savings for my family.

Another example is when struggling academically in high school I spoke up to my parents about the importance of having a tutor and a mentor and finding more academic resources for my schooling success. My parents and I obtained a tutor and enrolled me into a mentor program and after school activities that prevented me from being a student

at risk of academic failure. I also navigated oppression such as racial and gender discrimination in school by repeatedly reporting to the high school principal several discriminatory incidents I experienced from a teacher. These discriminatory incidents were never redressed, however, these incidents were recognized.

Josselson and Harway (2012) states by asserting willpower and autonomy, acts of everyday agency can help combat oppression. Acts of agency are not always performed alone. There are some cases that asserting agency as a collective can be more powerful but may require a connection to family member, advocates, or activists in the community. For instance, to create public forums as an event programmer in the women's resource center, I reached out to other Black female advocates and activists working in local women advocacy spaces, resource centers and non-profit organizations. Building relationships with other groups of women afforded me the opportunity to assert agency as a collective. Speaking out about my personal, lived experiences at public forums affords me the opportunity to assert agency individually. As a Black female, I use social platforms to stand up and speak out against social injustices frequently. I exercise agency everyday by resisting inroads of White supremacy, utilizing resilience to foster empowerment, and employing perseverance to maximize motivation on combatting social injustices. I could not have started on a path to agency without being conscious of multiple and simultaneous oppressions that impacted me.

These experiences informed my belief surrounding the simultaneous interlocking oppression on Black females in society. Because of my personal lived experiences, I began to ask questions about the existence of racialized structural domains producing and reproducing racism in order to help find solutions to eradicate my oppression. Critical theories such as intersectionality and critical race feminism can help to develop a frame to inform questions about

the structures and to contextualize and interpret findings regarding the interactions between Black females and primary social structures. What is intersectionality and how does it contribute to finding solutions to liberating oppressed people?

A Brief History of Intersectionality

In times of racial uplift, Black female writers and activists participated in chronicled events that began a revolution for intersectional social justice. Crenshaw (1989) coined the term *intersectionality* as a theory to introduce concepts of intersections into legal discourse. Crenshaw (1991) used the term intersectionality to express diverse ways in which gender and ethnicity interact to shape Black females' life experiences. Their experiences occur as multilayered oppressions, therefore creating different obstacles that disempower them. After Crenshaw (1989) popularized this descriptive term, it was broadly accepted as it revealed the concept of oppressions as simultaneous and interlocking. The term draws on the notion that oppressions are not suffered separately but rather as a single, synthesized experience (Smith, 2014). Crenshaw (1991) also used concepts of structural intersectionality to denote the ways in which the location of women of color at the intersections of gender and ethnicity makes the experience different than White women's experience.

Crenshaw (1995) brings to light Black females' experiences with social injustices and highlights the myriad ways they are discriminated against that frequently do not fit within legal classifications, such as sexism or racism, rather as a merger of sexism and racism. Therefore, intersectionality centers the voices and experiences of oppressed and marginalized women. The historiography of intersectionality is presented by scholars Hill-Collins and Bilge (2016, 2020), who explain the human experience and the

complexity in people as well as in the world as it pertains to intersectional experiences. In 1990, Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill-Collins (1990) refined the theory, suggesting that the effects of multiple oppressions cannot be detached because they are also experienced as interlocking systems of oppression. Hill-Collins and Bilge (2016) present a working definition of intersectionality to examine intersecting power relations and influences of social relations on individuals' everyday lives as well as across diverse societies.

In the same vein, the operational definition of intersectionality draws on the interwoven nature of social categorizations as applied to a group of people regarded as the overlapping systems of discrimination. Since the height of great social change during the 1960s and 1970s, an abundance of historical work has mapped the macroprocesses of racialization in the U.S. (Horsman, 1981; Stepan, 1982; Rogin, 1996; McKnight, 2010; Schein, 2012; Dalal, 2013; Deflem, 2017). Lewis's (2003) work on everyday race-making has made significant contributions to this literature. She examines how people reproduced racial categories in everyday interactions in primary social structures. To fully understand their hardships "requires not only looking at their racial and gender identity but also exploring the intersections of these identities" (Wing, 2020, p. 4). To fully comprehend how racialized structures in society impact the lives of Black females demands a deeper exploration of how they navigate the crossroads or intersections of multiple identities. Consider that, despite variations in socioeconomic, maternal health issues for Black women remain higher than for other women.

Hoyert (2020) unveils in a Center for Disease Control and Prevention report that maternal mortality rates were higher for non-Hispanic Black women at a rate of 55.3 deaths per 100,000 live births, 2.9 times the death rate compared to 19.1 for non-Hispanic White women and 18.2 for Hispanic women. Black women experience preventable maternal mortality and more

pregnancy complications than Hispanic and non-Hispanic women (Oparah & Bonaparte, 2015). In addition, Novao and Taylor (2018) stated in a Center for American Progress report, “Infants born to Black mothers are dying at twice the rate as infants born to non-Hispanic White mothers” (p. 1). Black females are situated at the bottom of society and are more likely to not have their needs met the way women who are racially privileged do. As an example, Black female’s socioeconomic disparities are rooted in racial inequality, but also can be seen in racial wealth divide and gender inequality, whereas Black males may experience a racial wealth divide and White females may experience gender inequality. Intersectionality provides a framework for interpreting how social divisions, such as race/ethnicity, gender, and class, amongst other things situate Black females differently in society.

Critical Race Feminism

Critical race feminism (CRF) draws upon concepts of feminism in a feminist discourse analysis. Wing (2000) states that CRF embraces feminism’s emphasis on gender oppression, within a system of patriarchy. At the close of the twentieth century, the theory of critical race feminism (CRF) emerged as a cultural and legal tool in feminist critical discourse. Today, the theory of CRF is commonly used as a race intervention method; however, adjusting Wing’s (2020) expression to use it more accurately as a racism intervention method is utilized to reduce ethnic disparities by investigating interconnected systems of oppression occurring in the lives of Black women and women of color. Delgado (1995) coined the term CRF in a literary collection called *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*. Wing (2020) echo Delgado’s claim that “CRF derives from the intertwining of three jurisprudential movements:

1) critical legal studies (CLS), 2) critical race theory (CRT), and 3) feminist jurisprudence/womanist theory” (p. 2). CLS, CRT, and feminist jurisprudence/womanism are three colorful strands of theory that are often researched to find viable solutions to assist women of color in overcoming oppression. The theoretically driven advocacy work of the Combahee River Collective (1977) played a vital role laying the foundations to the intersections of the three jurisprudential movements and articulated the multiple oppression concept. Crenshaw (1989) laid the groundwork of acknowledging the unique experiences of Black women and how multiple forms of discrimination are interconnected systems that of oppression. Delgado combined literature to examine the legal and cultural status of women of color whose lives were situated at the underside of society due to societal disadvantages. Crenshaw (1989), along with the Combahee River Collectives (1977), helped to shine light on the need to examine the cultural, legal, and political identity status of Black women experiencing discrimination and violence in order to bring forth liberation from oppression.

The resulting operational definition of CRF calls attention to the societal disadvantages of women of color who are disproportionately impoverished as it aims to understand exactly how a society systematizes itself along intersections of ethnicity, class, gender, and other effects and social dynamics of social hierarchies (Wing, 2020). Shortly after CRF theory was popularized in academic fields, it began to evolve into a movement based on the assumption that Black women have distinct experiences from both White women and men of color. It continues to contribute to various concepts in social science, humanities, and in law. It is important to note that the theory can be used to recognize the importance of interwoven identities that pertain to gender and ethnicity. Understanding the intersections of ethnicity and gender and how they are interrelated is extremely important. Therefore, using CRF as a tool can help combat intersections of ethnicity

and gender and initiate solutions to include Black female's voices, agency, willpower and autonomy in their personal lived experiences.

Taking the path of an intersectional approach to demarginalize the experiences of Black women in a practical and theoretical sense is key to alleviating the afflictions of marginalized people. In order to find solutions to help Black females overcome their oppression, one must understand the interconnecting systems of racialized structures of racism, sexism, and classism through the theories of intersectionality and CRF. Overall, if Black females were detached from interlocking systems of oppression, it could bring forth liberation.

Integrating Intersectionality and CRF

CRF and intersectionality are both viable theories to investigate and challenge ethnicity and gender issues. CRF was designed to make use of the foundation of feminism and critical race theory. Intersectionality was developed to simultaneously address adverse circumstances and discrimination and bring forward awareness of specific interlocking systems to help Black females resist oppression. CRF asserts that, despite the heterogeneity of Black females, their experiences are distinct from White women's and Black men's experiences. As women, Black and White females share some experience of common oppression as women/females. As Black females, they also share some experience with Black males, as Black people in a racist society.

Oppression can be challenged when unique experiences are recognized and distinctive. Intertwining intersectionality helps to identify and challenge unique experiences specific to marginalized Black females and analyze systems of oppression with the intent of undoing those systems at various levels and across domains of society.

Integrating both critical theories can be utilized to understand various ways oppressions work together in creating societal injustices, such as socioeconomic and educational discrimination. Integrating CRF and intersectionality as a theoretical framework can be a call to Black female scholars to advocate on behalf of Black females. As integrated theories, they are relevant to comprehending the ways in which identity-based systems and structures of oppression are interlinked, overlap, and can alter one another.

These theories emphasize intersection of race/ethnicity/class and gender and can help to better understand oppression of marginalized groups and to illuminate the compounds of discrimination so that people in those marginalized groups can understand their position in the U.S. in order to counteract oppression. ICRF, or intersectionality, and CRF have a synergistic relationship to counteracting oppression and can provide a critical analysis on the intersections and the multidimensional variable experiences of Black females. Synergy between intersectionality and CRF can produce important practices and new knowledge. ICRF can be utilized to “fully understand the situation of Black women requires not only looking at their racial identity and their gender identity but also exploring the intersection of these identities” (Wing, 2020, p. 4). Consequently, interweaving intersectionality and CRF can help to construct and legitimate counter stories that illuminate the voices of Black females.

Conclusion

In conclusion, more theory-building and praxis are needed from Black feminist researchers to study and challenge Black female raced and gendered experiences from ICRF perspective. Placing marginalized Black females at the center of the analysis can assist with encouraging a researcher’s sociological thinking in a way that invokes sensitivity and inclusivity when studying social experiences. Concerning the interactions of Black females and primary

social structures ICRF will include the views and experiences of Black women and shine light on their issues and encourage agency. ICRF can hold unique powers as a portal into the individual's life experience in the social world and simultaneously address sexism and race discrimination. ICRF theoretical framework can help to advocate for change. ICRF initiatives are needed to investigate the constant intersecting of social injustices, such as racism, sexism, and classism, resulting in multidimensional impacts of structural adverse circumstances for Black females. ICRF as a theory can be used as a concept to analyze how oppressions work together in creating overall societal injustices and contribute to finding solutions to liberating oppressed people. ICRF initiatives can help create a path for Black women to resist oppression.

Chapter 4: Voices From the Past: Black Women Experience Oppression in Education

In America, a corrosive system of racism permeates our government and communities, as well as educational institutions. This system is devilry, embedded in our society, which justified enslavement and continues to rationalize inequality in housing, health care, finances, employment, the criminal justice system, and education. Shapiro and Oliver (1997) argued that racial inequality is perpetuated through systemic barriers that limit educational opportunities. This system specifically impedes Black students' educational and economic success and shapes the lives of Black Americans. For all students to experience equity in schooling, systems and supportive relationships must be put in place to ensure each student has the support needed for their academic success and that resources and opportunities are equitable.

Educational inequality can include a wide range of oppressive mechanisms such as marginalization or unequal distribution of academic resources, which disrupts a student's academic success. These systems are interconnected to social injustices and negatively shape the lives of minoritized students, especially Black females. Overlapping systems applied to a marginalized group, such as Black females, produce even greater racial inequality. Because of America's history of racial inequality, Black females experience oppression in school, yet their voices have rarely been represented in the literature. Hence, this qualitative study focused on how Black women professionals narrate their past schooling experiences, and the findings highlight the challenges they navigated in order to survive. By shedding light on a group of Black women's educational oppression, researchers, policymakers, and educators can devise strategies to better support this socio-demographic in P-12 schooling as well as in higher education.

Background

Historically, racial inequality has prevented Black Americans from progressing professionally and educationally. During the 1950s and 1960s, stories of desegregating and integrating schools proliferated in newspapers. For instance, in 1957, the desegregation and integration of nine Black students into Little Rock Central High, an all-White school in Arkansas, gained national attention because Governor Orval mobilized the National Guard to prevent the Black students from attending the school. President Dwight Eisenhower removed the guards from Governor Orval's power and ordered 1,000 troops from Ft. Campbell, Kentucky, to move forward with integration. Eight of the nine Black students completed the school year at Central High despite suffering torment, discrimination, and hatred from White students (Beals, 2007).

Another example is the historical heroine, Ida B. Wells, who fought against racism and racial inequality and displayed perseverance, resiliency, and agency. She fought for the educational advancement of Black people. In the 1890s, she pioneered civil rights as an educated Black woman who began teaching at the age of 16 and fought dual battles of racism/classism and sexism. She established the first Black kindergarten school, co-founded the NAACP, and saw education as a gateway to the advancement of Black Americans (DuRocher, 2016). Although faced with marginalization, Black women have been ambitious trailblazers for racial equality and equitable education. Black females have suffered through marginalization in education for generations and are constantly at risk of school failure (Evans-Winters, 2005; Love, 2019; Price- Dennis & Muhammad, 2021). Despite that risk, the needs of Black female students often go unnoticed by administrators and educators (Evans-Winters, 2005; Love, 2019; Ricks, 2014) much less

the wider public. To address these needs, the federal government has initiated educational reform, such as the *White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, Economic Opportunity for Black Americans* (Cummings, 2022; Ransaw & Majors, 2016; Ricks, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Though well intentioned, these initiatives oftentimes overlook interlocking forces, such as the intersection of racism/classism, and sexism, in the educational experiences of Black females (Crenshaw, 1989; Evans-Winters, 2005; Hill-Collins & Bilge, 2016; Ricks, 2014; Smith, 2014; Wing, 1997). Removing these barriers requires solutions and conversations around social emotional growth, school climate, school discipline issues, and policy changes that are tailored to address both gender and racial bias.

The marginalization of Black girls and women in education is more than just a social phenomenon. Morris (2016) stated that Black females are already stereotyped as “irate, insubordinate, disrespectful, uncooperative, uncontrollable behavior, and social deviants” (p. 1) and to come into schools that are lacking a positive school climate and a supportive academic and physical environment causes them to have dreadful schooling experiences. In order to understand the impacts of these adverse structural circumstances on Black females, one must find methods and data collection tools to explore oppression and unveil the existence of marginalization.

Methods, Design, and Data

Establishing an ideal qualitative method and design is an essential component of a research study. Creswell (2007) offered beneficial tools for determining the most effective approach. The methodology I used is a dual-layered design, combining qualitative research inquiry with a phenomenological approach. First, Wertz et al. (2011) posited that qualitative research must “address the question of what, and looks at the nature of the phenomena, the very

nature of the human being themselves” (p. 3). Qualitative research should be utilized to transform the lives of marginalized people confronted with oppression (Creswell, 2013), such as educational hardship. Therefore, a qualitative inquiry was ideal for examining the concepts of Black female oppression and intersecting social injustices, such as racism/classism and sexism.

Second, phenomenology examines what and how phenomena are experienced. Creswell (2007) explained that phenomenology explores the shared meaning of personal lived experiences from the perspective of various individuals. Phenomenology explores the structures of human experience of self. Wertz et al. (2011) confirms that phenomenology investigates ways of being in the world by descriptive qualitative study of the human experience. Thus, utilizing qualitative inquiry and phenomenology brought forward additional elements to the human experience and gave structure to the personal lived experiences of the participants.

This was done by observing the participants’ stories in their own unique language and allowing them to freely express themselves without barriers, giving meaning to their experience in its natural state. My overall goal was threefold to (a) situate their stories at the center of the analysis, (b) establish a dual-layered theory and methodology to make sense of what occurs in their everyday lives from their standpoints, and (c) acknowledge their unique past schooling experiences. A dual-layered qualitative inquiry and phenomenological approach allows participants to describe their feelings as the essence of their human experience of self.

Research Design

Observation and phenomenological interviewing were utilized in this study to

explore how Black women narrate their schooling experience. My intent was to include participants in the age range of 18 to 65 years who identified as Black, African American, or Afro American women in the U.S. Utilizing the terminology *Black American* to classify participants is a sociopolitical designation for women of African or Hebrew descent who were born and raised in various communities in the U.S. This designation goes beyond a color or skin tone classification and extends beyond a racial identification, and it is about being consciously engaged in contesting systems of racial discrimination.

Therefore, the use of the term Black woman or Black female to describe my participants was necessary. Once my research study was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter). I selected Black women in the geographic location of the Midwest region of the United States. More specifically, I sent volunteer participation requests by email in the form of an outreach letter with a study criterion to individuals at predominately White academic institutions who were current working professionals (see Appendix B: Approved Recruitment Letter). The outreach letter demonstrated that the investigative study was focused on how Black women professionals with various working backgrounds conceptualized their schooling experiences. In regard to utilizing the best interviewing methods, Seidman (2013) suggested a three-interview series with each individual participant, therefore, I utilized this method to conduct the interviews.

After the volunteers indicated they wanted to participate in the research study, they had several weeks to submit a consent form and to schedule the interviews (see Appendix C: Approved Consent Form). I used a virtual face-to-face online setting, Zoom, to conduct the interviews. Zoom is a telecommunication program and software platform that allows online meeting and chat services, with video telephoning through peer-to-peer, cloud-based

teleconferencing. Regarding interviews, Seidman (2013) discussed the three-interview series as a “model of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing that involves conducting three separate interviews with each participant” (p. 20). Seidman stated that a three-interview series model helps the researcher (a) establish the context of the experience so that one may be immersed in the context of the participant’s experience, (b) focus on the participant’s life history as well as learning the details of current life experiences in the context in which they occurred, and (c) learn the meaning of the participant’s experiences and establish trust. Therefore, utilizing Seidman’s three-interview series model was ideal for this study.

Data Collection

To analyze racialized contexts of the interactions of Black women and explore their experiences of marginalization, I established an efficient way to collect the data, primarily using one-on-one audio-recorded interviews through Zoom. It was my intent to provide a setting through which the voices of Black women can be heard. Additionally, observational field notes were utilized as a method of data collection that captured how oppression had shaped the participants’ views and at the same time, revealed various ways that racism and gender had influenced their schooling.

Bailey (2007) discussed the importance of taking field notes while observing in the field and allowing multiple journals to be the researcher’s companion. This helps the researcher to be self-reflective while also protecting the emotions and position of the researcher. This was a very important concept for me to utilize because of my positionality as a Black woman professional educator who has experienced oppression in education. Journaling also gave a clearer understanding of the personal lived experiences

of the participants when observing their stories. Therefore, using this particular strategy provided a tool for data collection, analysis of the information needed to address the research questions, and self-reflection.

Participants

Through the course of emailing outreach letters, I received numerous responses to volunteer for this research study. While collecting consent forms, checking the research criterion, solidifying schedules, and setting up interviews, the number of volunteers who responded quickly dwindled down. Four Black females were selected to participate in this qualitative study to reflect on their memories and share their stories. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were used in place of their names. A brief description of each participant is given. Yana is a 63-year-old Black woman professional entrepreneur with hazel eyes and a lighter skin tone. Yana's name means "God is gracious" in Hebrew language. Yana is a very spiritual woman whose personality reflects one who is kind. Throughout the interview sessions, she repeatedly set aside moments to testify about the miracles God had performed in her life.

Hadah is a 47-year-old Black woman professional elementary school teacher and a caretaker of a family member. Hadah has brown eyes, dark brown hair, and a caramel brown skin tone. Hadah's name means "She who radiates joy" in Hebrew language. Hadah's personality reflects one who is modest. In each interview session, she wore her hair very chicly in a chin-length, bob hairstyle and medium-sized gold loop earrings that gave a sleek, demure look, tailored to suit her face. Hadah was very fashionable.

Na'va is a 39-year-old Black woman and professional social worker with a background in education and health care. Na'va obtained her bachelor's and master's degrees at a local

university. Na'va has brown eyes, dark brown hair, and a dark brown skin tone. Na'va wore her hair in a long, twisty braided style culturally popular with Black girls and women and the African diaspora. She also wore brown and tan glasses and medium-sized silver looped earrings in most of the interviews. Na'va's name means "delightful, beautiful" in Hebrew language. Na'va personality reflects one who is passionate about her work and her community. She is a very positive person, a spiritual woman, who has compassion for all people.

Noya is a 24-year-old Black woman professional custodian. She attends a local university, working towards the completion of her bachelor's degree. Noya's name means "beauty of God" in Hebrew language. Noya's personality reflects one who is kindhearted. Noya wears black glasses and has brown eyes, dark brown hair, and dark brown skin. Her hair was sometimes in a long, twisty braided hairstyle or short, twisty braided hairstyle, and she wore small silver earrings.

Thematic Analysis

Five key themes emerged from the participants' interviews pertaining to marginalization: (a) microaggression, (b) trauma, (c) stereotype, (d) invisibility, and (e) outcast. In numerous examples, I discovered that these themes were connected to one another. In this section, I use verbatim interview excerpts and ethnographic records to demonstrate each of the findings. I support the identified themes from the interviews, with data from observational field notes.

Microaggression

The theme *microaggression* emerged from the participants' stories as language used to express ridicule, underlying hostilities, and intentional biases towards one's

ethnicity. Researching historical references, theoretical documentation, and academic scholarly writings, I discovered that this term is directly connected to racism. Microaggression is connected to multiple forms of racial prejudice and structural racism (Williams, 2019). The term can be defined as subtle indignities and offenses that members of racial minority groups experience in their daily lives that involve the interaction between perpetrator and recipient (Torres et al., 2010).

Torres et al. (2010) also stated that microaggressions are a “modern form of racism comprised of subtle daily racial slights and insults, overt forms of discrimination” (p. 1075). As an example, when I asked Na’va to describe her elementary school experience, she stated, “*I remember this young White woman who was terrible! Who had no business teaching young Black kids at all...before I knew what microaggressions was... I just remember her saying terrible stuff to everyone.*” Similarly, Noya described her elementary school experiences of racism and intentional biases. She stated, “*I remember the White teachers being racists. One teacher agreed to tutor me. Because we didn’t pay her that day, she got angry and actually showed up at my house harassing us for her money.*”

In contrast, Yana described her middle school experiences of intentional biases with a White teacher. Yana stated, “*Mr. Haynes picked on me a lot. I remember I put my head down on the desk, and he told me to go and stand in front of the window and to look at the birdies.*” While Na’va, Noya, and Yana focused on their teachers’ hostility, Hadah, who attended a diverse middle school, focused on her peers’ hostility. Hadah stated, “*I was fed up. I said to the girl, You wanna fight? Let’s do it! The teacher was very disappointed in me.*” From these examples, it is clear all the participants experienced microaggressions whether by their teachers or their peers.

Trauma

The theme *trauma* emerged from the participants' stories as language used to express a deeply disturbing experience that significantly alters one's life. Researching historical references, theoretical documentation, and academic scholarly writings, I discovered the expression of this term is connected to the perception of a person's traumatic experience. Trauma is a series of experiences or impacts from social conditions (Haines, 2019). Hardy (2013) defined trauma as the "victim's perception of the traumatic experience, and how the experience can actually leave a person with feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and a yearning for a sense of safety or survival" (p. 25).

All four participants recounted examples of trauma at home because of social conditions of the family. As an example, I asked Hadah if she experienced challenges in middle school, and she replied, "*I would say, there was a lot of traumas there. Turbulent things happened in my home life, and that spilled over into school.*" Similarly, Yana described enduring years of abuse and trauma in her home life from her mother. She stated, "*I will never forget. My mom put my hand in the fire on a gas stove.*"

Yana went on to describe a hidden mark on her scalp from the abuse. She stated, "*I also remember when my mother did my hair, she played tic tac toe in my head with a spike-heeled shoe.*" In contrast, Na'va described trauma in her childhood homelife. Na'va stated, "*After my parents divorced, I lived with my mom from ages 8-13. She was an alcoholic. I was always late to school. She forgot to pick me up because she was always drunk.*" Noya also described trauma in her childhood homelife. Noya stated, "*Me and my brother had disabilities. I never got the help I needed from my parents or from school. When my parents divorced a lot of traumatic*

things happened.” In this context, Hadah connected her trauma to witnessing her mother’s abuse. Yana connected her trauma to the abuse she received from her mother. Na’va connected her trauma to a parental divorce and her mother’s alcoholism. Noya connected her trauma to her parents’ divorce. Hardy (2013) spoke of trauma being characterized as a hidden wound that is interconnected to internalized devaluation and ultimately oppression. From these examples, it is clear all the participants experienced trauma.

Stereotype

The theme *stereotype* emerged from the participants’ stories as language used to express distorted perceptions. Researching historical references, theoretical documentation, and academic scholarly writings, a stereotype is a form of misrepresentation that is demonstrated in media images of Black women, disempowering them through racist images (Harris-Perry, 2011; Poran, 2006). For Black females, such experience of racial hatred is often perpetuated by stereotypes that degrade or hypersexualize them (Curry, 2017; Henning, 2021; Love, 2019).

As an example of stereotype, Na’va discussed her elementary school experiences of stereotyping that Black students received from White teachers. I asked Na’va to give an example of stereotyping from a teacher. She replied, *“It was always stuff about hair styles and hair needing to be combed more.”* Na’va seemed to connect this experience to the social and ethnic identities of Black kids. In this context, stereotyping can be seen in the form of humiliation or an offensive action specific to one’s ethnicity and identity which is degrading. I found this conclusion to be accurate because Na’va then stated, *“The teacher said stereotypes about little Black boys and little Black girls; everything was talking back! All of the teachers were White. That’s what I pretty much remember.”* In comparison, Noya discussed her middle school experiences of stereotyping coming from her peers. I asked Noya to give an example of

stereotyping. She replied, *“There was a White boy who always called me and my friend Sharkeisha and Sharkeisha. After we told him that’s not our names, he laughed and kept calling us both Sharkeisha. I feel like he was stereotyping us.”*

Hadah discussed her high school experiences transitioning from a majority Black school to a majority White school. Hadah stated, *“I was made fun of because I didn’t have the right clothes to wear. One girl laughed and said I looked like a Muslim.”* Hadah reported experiences of stereotyping from her peers that was similar to Noya’s experiences. In this context, stereotyping can be seen in the form of an offensive action specific to one’s ethnicity and identity which is degrading. Like Hadah, Yana also transitioned schools and described feeling of degradation. Yana discussed her academic struggles with transitioning from a diverse middle school to a predominately White high school.

Yana stated, *“I recall always being afraid of my teachers. I was scared to ask for help. I didn’t ask questions; I didn’t want to be embarrassed.”* Na’va connects her experiences of stereotyping to teachers intentionally degrading Black kids’ hair styles. It’s important to understand that not all participants experienced stereotyping perpetrated by their teachers; some experienced it from peers. Noya connects her experience of stereotyping to a peer intentionally misnaming her. Hadah connects her stereotyping to a peer making fun of her clothes and Yana connects stereotyping to feelings of degradation from her teachers. Although the details vary from participant to participant, all four participants described experiencing stereotyping that led to feelings of degradation.

Invisibility

The theme *invisibility* emerged from the participants’ stories as language used to

express being unnoticed and unacknowledged. Black girls' feelings of invisibility stem from the school environment and a collection of institutional policies and practices (Morris, 2016).

Parham (1999) defined invisibility as (a) a global phenomenon for African people due to European colonization, (b) a syndrome to socially oppressive phenomena, and (c) something that Black people under conditions of White supremacy experience as a process, as well as an encountered experience. Mosley (1980) described Black women's experiences of oppression in education as (a) she feels invisible, and it is never advantageous to be unseen; (b) "she is constantly being bumped up against by those of poor vision[;] and (c) she often doubts that she really exists" (p. 307).

An example of how this term was used in the interviews came about when I asked Hadah if there were any changes with her transition from middle school to high school. She replied, "*It was about me being more accepted by peers. I felt like I was nothing. I felt invisible.*" I asked Yana to describe any learning challenges with a middle school teacher, and she replied, "*Some of the teachers helped me. But when you don't say nothing when you really need help, they won't help you. The teachers see you, but they don't see you, they like see over you.*" Another example is how Noya described feeling invisible in the school hallways as well as in class. She stated, "*Sometimes in the school hallways I feel invisible. In class I am invisible except when the teacher calls on me to comment on things dealing with Black history.*" Na'va described similar feelings of going unnoticed in high school and challenges with her math teacher. Na'va stated, "*I was failing my math class because I wasn't getting the knowledge. The language she used was that I was retarded because I didn't grasp basic concepts. I internalized the blame. I felt dumb.*" Hence, all participants experienced a form of invisibility and it's important to note that feelings of invisibility can severely impair a person's self-esteem and personal growth (Morris, 2016;

Wyatt, 1999).

Outcast

The theme *outcast* emerged from the participants' stories as language used to express feelings of exclusion, ostracization, isolation, or alienation in a social or cultural way. No historical references, academic resources, or documentation that I found directly connected to the term "outcasted." In order to grasp and understand the essence of this theme, I had to further investigate and find terminology. Diekema (1992) provided a conducive way of thinking about forms of isolation in relation to other-imposed aloneness as the state of being secluded or disconnected from interactions by others. Additionally, Morris (2016) suggested that isolation is a form of being an outcast regarding a socioeconomic experience concerning Black girls. However, Mosley (1980) pointedly stated that Black women are "isolated, their academic opportunities are limited by barriers that have nothing to do with their preparation, qualifications, or competency" (p. 306- 307).

To illustrate the term outcast, I asked Noya if she experienced any challenges in the classroom. She replied, "*I was pointed out a lot. I was embarrassed, sad, and I felt dumb. I felt like a unicorn...like... I felt like a pimple on somebody's face ...just outcasted.*" Similarly, I asked Yana to describe her home life and she stated, "*I remember getting whippings for having a bed-wetting problem. I was picked on a lot; I was the outcast of the family.*" In comparison, I asked Hadah to describe her high school experience, and she replied, "*I had feelings of not fitting in, not being accepted by my peers.*" Similar to Hadah, Na'va discussed challenges with fitting in with her transition from a diverse private school to a predominately Black high school. She stated, "*This*

transition was really different. It was scary.” Noya and Yana described feelings of being an outcast while Hadah and Na’va described feelings of exclusion or alienation from their peers.

Hence, all of the participants connected their experiences to a form of outcast in a social or cultural way. Despite societal prohibition on the use of racist language, one of the most offensive words used as a symbol of violence on Black people in America unfolded as an oppressive experience for one of the participants. While the term *nigger* was not considered a major theme, it emerged as an uncommon yet critical theme. Adegbembo and MacQuarrie (2017) stated, *nigger* is a slur that “[imposes] contempt on [Blacks] as an inferior race” (p. 17). To illustrate how this phrase was used as a slur, Hadah discussed how growing up in a predominately Black neighborhood was like a village, a place full of love. However, outside of the community Hadah experienced a racial slur. Hadah stated, *“I do remember being called a nigger a couple of times when I went over into a White neighborhood.”* Unfortunately, this term is still in existence and is connected to Black people’s historical, social, and cultural identities.

Implications and Findings

This study has implications for Black female professionals in various career and educational paths. However, this study has stronger implications for schoolteachers, administrators, and political leaders interested in policies that support student schooling experiences and provide professional development to teachers. This study also has implications for educational researchers interested in studying Black females’ schooling experiences. Understanding the complex nature of Black women professionals’ experiences of oppression in schooling is paramount. The participants in the study characterized their encounters and described their feelings inclusive of social, cultural, and/or educational oppression. The aim of this analysis was to observe a unit of meaning in the collected data and then to identify, analyze,

organize, describe, and report themes within a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, a small dataset of four participants allowed me to identify and report specific themes that emerged from their stories. Experiences shared in this research shed light on various ways Black females experience and navigate oppression. It was imperative to add and amplify the voices of the participants to existing literature because they bring a unique viewpoint to oppression in education, a viewpoint that has often been missing in the literature.

In this research study, I illustrated the importance of understanding and critically examining Black females' schooling experiences. Having the opportunity to collect and analyze data from the interviews revealed evidence of feelings of oppression and forms of isolation linked to marginalization. As Mosley (1980) said Black women are "isolated, their academic opportunities are limited by barriers that have nothing to do with their preparation, qualifications, or competency" (pp. 306-307). This analysis reveals the connection of self-reflective memories that the participants used to express their experiences of oppression or marginalization in educational environments. Creswell (2007) considered reflecting on essential themes to be "what constitute the nature of lived experience" (p. 59). Essential themes, such as microaggression, trauma, stereotype, invisibility, and outcast, emerged as a language to describe the nature of the participants' lived experience concerning oppression in education.

Marginalization continuously showed up in the participants' stories, supporting the notion that the participants experienced oppression and isolation in education. The thematic analysis from the findings reveals intersecting social injustices that played a key role in their educational experiences. Using the phenomenological research approach

offered me the opportunity to capture critical thematic accounts of the participants' personal lived experience.

Limitations and Recommendations

While the scope of my research is limited, the potential implications are profound. The main limitations in this study may be that (a) the study may not be applicable to the entire Black woman population in the United States and is aimed towards a specific group of women; (b) the criteria and selection of respondents having to have a professional working background may not include non-professional working Black women; and finally, (c) the geographical location of the study represented Black women in the Midwest region only.

It is imperative that more stories from Black women from all geographic regions and career backgrounds continue to be written. Future research needs to expand the population and region when exploring the personal lived experiences of Black women, the various forms of marginalization they experience, and effective schooling intervention methods (Evans-Winters, 2005; Love, 2019; Morris, 2016). Broader research across disciplines on Black females can provide a wider lens through which to view voice.

Furthermore, in order to ensure educational equity for Black females, educators and administrators must address how community members and families can assist schools with combatting the oppressive experiences of Black females. In addition, an examination of educational oppression resulting from racism and gender discrimination could lead educators, administrators, policymakers, and advocates to engage in reform to counteract negative educational outcomes. Therefore, I challenge researchers to develop new studies to explore the degree and prevalence of oppression in the schooling of Black females. In any such work, the voices of Black females should not be silent, rather they should remain at the center of the

analysis.

Conclusion

Everyday experiences of racism negatively impact and educationally and socially influence the day-to-day routines of Black women professionals (Essed, 1991; Lewis, 2003). This research study afforded me the opportunity to represent their situated worlds of being Black women professionals in the United States. It unveiled the complexities of intersectional oppressions, revealed how oppression shaped their educational experiences, and included the narration of their stories in their own voices. While analyzing these interviews, it became evident that these oppressive experiences were connected to marginalization, and how it shaped the participants' views and influenced their everyday lives. It was my intent to provide a setting through which the voices of Black women could be heard. I have a desire to give a platform to a population of marginalized people whose stories aren't commonly represented in the academic literature.

I have had experiences similar to the participants and have had to navigate similar oppressions, which made our communication effortless, and my understanding of their experiences was clear during interviews. Beyond the media's negative imagery of Black women in society, the need to make this population my focal point and to put them at the center of the analysis is because of my identity of being a Black woman professional in the United States. It was also important to me to acknowledge the privilege and honor to accomplish interviews with such phenomenal women and to capture the essence of their stories. This was a rewarding experience. As a Black woman researcher of Black women's oppression, I too have lived in an urban community and have experienced marginalization in education. This study used theoretical frameworks that challenge

oppression (i.e., intersectionality) and explore the intersections between various oppressed identities (i.e., critical race feminism theory), such as being Black, a woman, and a professional, which can help researchers and educators to better understand Black female experiences and the impact of marginalization and to create strategies to support their education.

My goal was to frame the study in such a way that others could better understand the personal lived experience of Black women who narrated their own stories and unveiled experiences of oppression in education. Ultimately, through sharing personal lived experiences, Black females can amplify their voices and express themselves in empowering ways so that readers can see the world through their eyes. Shedding light on the trauma and isolation Black women experienced socially and educationally as a result of microaggression and stereotyping, as I have done in this research study, helps to remove the outcast status of Black women and places their personal lived experiences at the center of the analysis.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

A Further Exploration on Black Women Experiences of Oppression in Education

In the U.S., there is widespread inequality among different racial and socioeconomic groups that exists within historically steep and egregious inequality between the wealthiest and the rest of society. The complex history of deeply rooted social injustices in the U.S. reflects the nations inability to overcome systemic racism in education. Evans-Winters (2005) posited that the history of institutionalized racism in the U.S. has placed the majority of Black Americans at the bottom of society, thus situating them as a disadvantaged group. Tourse et al. (2018) suggested institutionalized racism is an entrenched system “initiated and legitimized through laws, treaties, legal practices and court decisions” (p. 25).

The public policies, laws, and government-funded entities produces systemic racism through a variety of everyday ways, such as in housing, health care, food, water and air quality, employment, and education. U.S. racialized structures are embedded in our education system and hinder the advancement of Black females in education. Evans-Winters (2005) pointed out that due to race/ethnicity, gender, and class oppression in the U.S., initiatives are needed that investigate the constant intersecting social injustices that impact Black women. In order to understand the impacts of structural adverse circumstances on Black women, one must find theories and methodologies as tools to explore the intersecting oppressions and unveil the existence of school-based racial and gender discrimination. In this exploration on Black women oppression in education I recommend critical race feminism and intersectionality as critical theories along with four key elements, demarginalization, anti-essentialism, racism intervention, and

counternarrative, as anti-racism analytic tools to examine educational inequities and issues associated with Black women's oppression in schooling as well as to address other issues in education that need further exploration. These concepts address a narrow scope of racial issues concerning educational inequities that could be used to eradicate the intersections of race/ethnicity, gender, and class oppression on Black females in education.

Critical Race Feminism (CRF), Intersectionality and Educational Inequities

Education institutions are one of the most racialized structures in America. It was not long ago that students were segregated, and some were prohibited from attending higher education institutions. This corrosive system of institutional racism permeate education at every level of schooling. Solomon and Rankin (2019) argued the need to reduce racial disparities in education and that there is a suffocating intrusion of educational inequities in the lives of Black people. Students are marginalized, essentialized, and racialized every day in schooling. Because of the inequities, students are receiving different learning experiences in schooling based on their ethnicity and their status.

Demarginalization

Marginalization and racial oppression are some hardships that can impede Black women's learning success in education. In order to find solutions to help Black females overcome their educational oppression, one must understand the interconnecting systems of racialized structures, and this can be done through demarginalizing the intersections. Brown (2009) argued the collective constructions of marginalization as it pertains to the process of class, gender, sexualization, racialization, and the importance of transforming oppressive educational institutions to empower Black women. Disrupting mistreatment of Black females in schooling can bring empowerment and transform their learning experiences. Black female

students have different learning styles and different learning experiences, yet oftentimes they are unsupported when it comes to receiving educational support and are more than likely not receiving adequate academic support to better their schooling experiences.

Marginalization is a major inequity in education that runs deeper than unjust and unfair treatment. There are subtle perpetual experiences of caste discrimination and disadvantages deeply rooted in underlying social and racial inequities. Intersectionality as a critical theory exposes the degree of oppression which is the effect of multidimensional hardships stemming from racism, sexism, and classism. Smith (2014) argued that oppressions are not suffered separately but as a single, synthesized experience. CRF bring forth the awareness of the multiple oppressions experienced and continuous shifting of multiple consciousness for Black females.

Ultimately, these critical theories bring forth an awareness of issues of educational oppression to combat social injustices and eradicate persistent inequities in schooling. To fully comprehend how marginalization in education impedes the lives of Black females, a deeper exploration is needed of how they must navigate intersecting oppressions in order to have better schooling experiences. According to Brown (2009), Black females are marginalized due to their race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class. The marginalization of Black females in education consists of experiences of racial barriers, personal devaluation, stigmatization, and stereotyping. Black females are often mislabeled and may not receive the social and emotional support needed for academic success. They endure the impact of “multiple subordination coupled with institutional expectations based on inappropriate non-intersectional contexts, shapes and ultimately limits the opportunities for meaningful intervention on their behalf” (Crenshaw, 1991, p.

1251). In order for Black women to gain liberation and justice, they need demarginalization of oppressive experiences. Crenshaw (1989) posited the idea of demarginalization to unveil the links between race/ethnicity and gender by treating race/ethnicity and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience. Demarginalization involves examining how intersecting power relations affect racial and social relations that goes beyond everyday schooling experiences. Taking the path of an intersectional approach to demarginalize the circumstances of Black females in a practical and theoretical sense is key to alleviating the afflictions of marginalized people (Crenshaw, 1989). Demarginalizing the intersections does these three things: (a) it examines how intersecting power relations affect racial and social relations in education, (b) it offers practical and relevant implications to Black females in education, (c) it assist with reconceptualizing the complexity of Black women navigating multiple oppressions as well as multiple consciousnesses and, (d) to demarginalize the intersecting oppressions of Black women can unveil the interconnectedness of race/ethnicity and gender consistently intersecting, resulting in multi-dimensional effects of structural adverse circumstances. Therefore, demarginalization allows for the avoidance of gender and racial essentialism.

Anti-Essentialism

Racial essentialism can be a harmful experience of educational inequity for Black women. CRF can be utilized to unveil the harmful effects of essentialism concerning women's voice and distinctiveness. Wing (2020) argued that essentialism is harmful to supporting the ideas or the personal interests of women of color because it leaves an examination of their experiences void of distinctiveness and humanity. CRF is an anti-essentialist approach that confronts the ideology that all experiences of Black men are indistinguishable from most experiences of Black women (Wing, 2020).

However, essentialism also suggests that a Black woman's essence is universal, and a result of their natural characteristics are unique and specific to her individual characteristics. Wing (2020) stated that "one essential Black voice ends up privileging Black male voices and assumes Black women think the same as men thus CRF is anti-essentialist and requires acknowledging the differences and complexities in people's lives" (p. 3). Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) posited that the "CRF movement purports that Black females' experiences, thus perspectives, are different from the experiences of Black men and those of White women's" (p. 20). Intersectionality helps to reroute the conceptualization on not just the difference of schooling experiences between Black females, Black men, and White women but also shines light on the simultaneous and interlocking nature of oppressions on Black females' schooling. It is particularly important when viewing issues of essentialism to view from an emancipatory lens (Wing, 2020). This key element can narrowly examine issues pertaining to gender and race/ethnicity with an awareness of cultural, political, and social oppression and why and how it came into existence.

Therefore, utilizing CRF informed by intersectionality to unveil the key element of essentialism does these three things: (a) Utilizing anti-essentialism seeks to merge various ideas on why and how social injustices, such as gender and race discriminations, as well as visibility and voice, function within and are bound by structures of inequities in education (Wing, 2020); (b) anti-essentialism helps to embrace patterns of knowing in order to find ways to identify and eliminate forces that impede the well-being of Black women in schooling; and (c) anti-essentialism can also bring awareness to impediments to combatting social injustices and eradicating persistent inequities in education (Wing,

2020). With this in mind, the context of CRF and intersectionality in securing the anti-essentialized experiences of Black women in education unveils a need to interrogate the intersections of race/ethnicity and gender. There must be a conceptualization of the Black female students' experience from a racialized paradigm. Accordingly, an anti-essentialism approach works as an anti-racism tool to combat the harmful essentialism that Black females experience in education.

Consequently, CRF informed by intersectionality can be utilized as a solution to help Black females in education by laying out their multiple identities and exploring how those identities intersect and subject them to discrimination. Furthermore, using CRF informed by intersectionality can help demarginalize the intersections of race/ethnicity and gender, shifting the focus to overlapping discriminatory systems in education that cause Black females to have to navigate racialized structures in their schooling experience (Crenshaw, 1989). Finally, demarginalization and anti-essentialism can be used as an anti-racism tool to eradicate the intersections of race/ethnicity, gender, and class oppression on Black females in education.

Racism Intervention

A racial divide is still present in education, and to combat racial division in education, one must examine the root cause of the racialized structure. One of the key elements of intersectionality is to unveil the existence of interconnecting oppressions within racialized structures in education in order to eradicate the intersections of multidimensional oppressions such as race/ethnicity, gender, and class. Examining the root cause of the racialized structure may provide race intervention tools to eradicate racism. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2016) argued that "although both class and gender can and do intersect race, as stand-alone variables they do not explain all of the educational achievement differences apparent between Whites and students

of color” (p. 51). One of the major disparities that students of color, specifically Black females’ experiences in education oppression is racial and gender discrimination (Harris-Perry, 2011). Racial and gender discrimination can be viewed as racial boundaries used as a vehicle for social isolation in school (Lewis, 2003). One of the key elements of (CRF) and intersectionality is constituting a race intervention method to study racial boundaries and reduce ethnic disparities by examining interlinked systems of racial and gender discrimination in the lives of girls and women of color in education (Wing, 2000). While examining ethnic disparities, I found three key components of racial and gender discrimination as an educational inequity that can cause students to feel isolated or alienated and cause them to fail academically at higher rates than students of all other ethnicities. Isolation and alienation for Black females in school can display as stress, negative attitudes, challenging behaviors, and decrease their academic performance. These educational issues impacting Black females in education need to be investigated to disrupt inequities.

Utilizing CRF informed by intersectionality (a) can be a beneficial tool to study schooling inequities by investigating issues impacting Black females to understand the effect of racialized structures (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010); (b) can tell how racism operates and confront the impact and history of racialized structures in education to help disrupt inequities; and (c) can provide a framework for interpreting how racial and social divisions, such as race/ethnicity, gender, and class, amongst other things, situate Black women differently in education. With this in mind, race intervention tools in the form of anti-racist feminist programs can be used to combat against racial and gender discrimination (Wing, 2000). Consequently, CRF and intersectionality can comprehend

the complexity of their experiences in education. For this purpose, utilizing CRF and intersectionality brings forth anti-racism tools to combat educational inequities.

Counternarrative

One of the major educational inequities that Black females' experience is exclusion, especially pertaining to invisibility and their voices excluded when telling of their personal lived experiences concerning oppression in education. There are several implications for racial inequality in silencing of Black females' voices which CRF and intersectionality can help to advocate for change. An immensely powerful tool that Black women can use to shine light on their personal lived experiences with educational hardships is through storytelling which can counteract systems of oppression that contribute to their voicelessness and invisibility (Wing, 2000). Intersectionality centers the voices and experiences of the marginalized by using counter stories to bring forth an analysis of race/ethnicity and adequately address racism in education. CRF can also be used as a counter storytelling mechanism, while intersectionality is used as a mode to codify the unique voices of Black women in speaking against social injustices.

Using counter storytelling to amplify their experiences can allow underprivileged Black women the ability to tell their truths and to transcend deeply rooted hardship, which can help them to resist oppression (Wing, 2000). Counter in itself indicates a place of resistance against supremacy. Black women utilizing a counter-narrative approach transcend storytelling because they have agency to tell their own stories and choose their own words to articulate their personal lived experiences, which genuinely represent their realities. CRF relies on storytelling as a means of constructing and communicating experiences. Counter stories are a powerful means to use as a vantage point of resistance to integrate and dismantle racism. According to Brown (2009), institutional narratives often label Black females' actions as too loud, too much, too sexual, and

too disruptive, and they must work to resist those narratives (p. 26). In a narrower sense, CRF informed by intersectionality can present a way to comprehend the essentiality of how social conditions within education have helped to shape the narrative and their schooling experiences. Therefore, interweaving intersectionality and CRF can help to construct counter stories that illuminate the voices of Black females in education to include their views and shine light on their issues. This can generate benefits while shining light on the collective struggle of Black females' schooling experiences in racialized structures.

CRF informed by intersectionality can be a portal into the individual's life experience in the social world and simultaneously address sexism and race discrimination in education. CRF and intersectionality can help lay the foundation for advancing our knowledge about how gender, race/ethnicity, and class intersect to shape inequitable power structures in schooling. The absence of an intersectional analysis can reduce the strength of abstract and logical understanding of racism while reducing cultural bias and comprehending narratives from the perspective of Black females. Demarginalizing the intersections and using anti-essentialism to help with voice and visibility are anti-racism tools to fight against racial and gender discriminations, as well as exploring further issues in education. Each critical theory can be utilized to analyze Black women's schooling for educational inequities and be a helpful tool to create racial and social intervention programs and other methods to combat oppression. With this in mind, counter stories are an anti-racism tool that has a powerful means to be used as a vantage point of resistance to integrate and dismantle racism. Therefore, CRF and intersectionality together, can bring forth effective tools to combat against racial inequality in education as a whole.

Recommendation to Explore Black Women Oppression in Education

The purpose of this analysis is the recommendation to explore educational oppression on Black women to bring forth issues in schooling experiences and reveal educational inequities so that a more successful educational experience can be achieved. Several other areas can be explored to examine educational inequities, such as invisibility. Research scholar Wyatt (1999) defined invisibility as a feeling that can severely impair a person's self-esteem and personal growth. Furthermore, research scholar Mosley (1980) pointedly stated that "Black women are isolated, and their academic opportunities are limited by barriers that have nothing to do with their preparation, qualifications, or competency. The Black woman is an alien in a promised land, obscure, unwelcome, and unwanted" (pp. 306-307). Looking further at what it means to be unwanted and unwelcome in the academic language, research scholar Mosley (1980) also states that pertaining to Black women's status, "she is an invisible woman, it is never advantageous to be unseen, she is constantly being bumped up against by those of poor vision and, she often doubts that she really exists" (p. 307). Exclusion is another area that needs further exploration when it comes to Black female students experiencing educational inequities.

Evans-Winters (2005) pointed out that due to race/ethnicity, gender, and class oppression in the U.S., Black females are in multiple jeopardy of race/ethnicity, class, and gender exclusion in mainstream educational institutions. Consequently, CRF informed by intersectionality is an important theory building tool to explore schooling experiences. Race/ethnicity, class, and gender inequities in education are the culprits of demotivation, isolation, and alienation of Black students. Racialization, marginalization, essentialization and, exclusion are oppressive mechanisms that need to be further explored to find solutions to help students overcome educational inequities. It is important for educational researchers to study the foundations of

systemic racism in schooling and foundational socioeconomic experiences of individuals in order to help find solutions to abolish oppression in education.

The central concept of race is undeniably critical in educational inequality; therefore, with race/ethnicity at the forefront of the analysis, there can be room to create effective processes for transformative schooling and educational reform. Some of the other educational inequities that Black women endure in their schooling experience that need further exploration are (a) their experience of racial and gender discrimination that act as the double burden of everyday racism in school (St. Jean & Feagin, 1998); (b) their experience of being devalued and stereotyped in school (Harris-Perry, 2011); (c) their experience of misrepresentation and social pressured in school (Poran, 2006); (d) their experience of social mistreatment in school (Crenshaw, 1989); (e) their experience with micro aggression, enduring insults, and harassment as daily indirect racial slights in school (Torres et al., 2010); and (f) their experience of criminalization and disproportionate punishment in regards to suspensions and expelling at higher rates than White female students in school (Morris, 2018).

Several other inequitable educational issues need to be explored for Black females. There is a need for equity-oriented pedagogies in teaching methods as well as in the curriculum and safe spaces for Black female students that acknowledge their specific needs. An exploration of schooling experience in educational spaces can permit an excellent epistemological analysis to bring forth social justice methods to help Black females experiencing educational inequities. There is a need for further exploration of race/ethnicity, class, and gender as well as other identities in all other complexities while situating the study within a careful analysis of systemic oppression.

There is a need for further exploration of culturally relevant pedagogy quality curriculum, and skillful educators in the classrooms that can help find ways to close the gaps in educational achievement and combat unequal access to educational resources for Black female students. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2016) pointed out that racial disparities persist in our education system and that students of color have disproportionately lower access to preschool and higher rates of suspension from preschool onward, which are examples of unequal access to resources for Black female students. Additionally, Black females have limited access to advanced classes and college programs or access to counselors as compared to their White counterparts.

Utilizing CRF informed by intersectionality as a framework to research schooling issues impacting Black females inside and outside of schools, such as addressing their emotional and social development, is crucial to enhancing their schooling experiences. Therefore, this analysis suggests a need for pedagogies that investigate Black female students' specific academic needs and also invokes an educational reform initiative because their experiences are different from Black male and White female students'. Black female students need advocates on all fronts. Literature suggests Black female students are targeted and mislabeled with behavioral issues because of their attitudes and are disproportionately punished at higher rates than any other female students of color. Morris (2016) pointed out that Black female students experience higher levels of suspension, expulsion, and disproportionate harm for mislabeled behavioral issues that turns into violations such as corporal punishment.

For instance, Morris (2016) discusses educational institutional oppression on Black girls from a lens of criminalization. She stated 42% of Black girls receive corporal punishment. She argues that if Black girls only make up 16% of girls in schools, why are 45% experiencing at least one out-of-school suspension, 42% are expelled and 31% are referred to law enforcement.

Initiating an exploration on disproportionate punishment can also illuminate the fact that Black females are targets of infractions and for them to adhere to a more acceptable standard in education that appeals to a White, middle class population. In conclusion, education is still broken, and we need more research on how to create an equitable path for marginalized, essentialized, and racialized students. Essed (1991) pointed out the harmfulness of everyday manifestations of racism, the reality of tolerance and how there is no legitimate basis for opposition to racism. The everyday reality for Black women in schooling involves the tolerance of racism, conquering racial barriers, overcoming gender obstacles, continually negotiating the educational institutional landscape, navigating confrontations and inequalities, and constantly battling to survive a never- ending attack while schooling in a gigantic, racialized structure.

There are limitations for conceptualizing life experiences of Black women in education and unveiling how their daily life experiences impact how and what they learn. Despite these limitations, there is a need for more scholarship to reinterpret schooling and view schooling processes of Black females. Evans-Winters (2005) argued that there is an “absence of Black girls in resiliency literature and place a call to action to implement alternative theoretical approaches to study the interactions of race, class and gender on their educational experiences” (p. 4).

Placing marginalized students at the center of the analysis can assist with invoking inclusivity and sensitivity when exploring the educational experiences of marginalized students.

Educational scholar Boukari (2005) stated that when dealing with Black females’ schooling experiences, one cannot transform education for them without mentioning the socio- historical context in which they were educated. Educators

dedicated to providing social justice and educational equity need to be conscious of intersectionality and more cognizant of the intersecting and interwoven patterns of oppression experienced by many students of color whom they serve. Regardless of one's race/ethnicity, class, or gender, every student should have equal access to equitable education. Black women experience a stressful impact and/or emotional pain related to their experience with racism and discrimination. Demonstrating a recognition and appreciation of difference is a vital step in creating inclusive and supportive learning spaces.

However, acknowledging equity in education for marginalized students requires rectifying the structure, policies, and practices that contribute to inequitable treatment of marginalized students. As an equity-focused educator, I must acknowledge my own multiple identities and multiple oppression experiences as a Black woman. Because of my own firsthand experiences with oppression in education I feel deep down in my soul the need to make this population my focal point and to put them at the center of the analysis. There is a need to explore, call out, and interrupt inequitable practices and policies that operate to form multiple interrelated systems of inequities that affect the meaningful participation and representation of Black women in education.

Morris (2016) stated that incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) encourages cultural sensitivity and inclusivity by acknowledging student's backgrounds and experiences. Including CRP creates supportive learning spaces, encourages bicultural learning and critical thinking therefore, reducing educational inequities. Morris (2016) also stated the benefits of gender responsive curricular can help combat gender obstacles and racial barriers, and trauma informed practices incorporated into curriculum, policies and practices shifts the paradigm of accountability and reduces discipline disparities as well as gender and racial disparities.

Morris (2016) stated the use of restorative practices in urban schools has been found to support a reduction in differential handling and suspension. Increasing the number of Black female educators who will question discipline protocols and call out the hyper punitive climates in educational environments can potentially interrupt inequitable practices and policies (Morris, 2016; Love, 2019; Evans-Winters, 2005). The belief is that Black women experience hardship educationally due to racialized structures in education, which inherently causes them to have greater difficulties achieving educational lifelong successes.

Marginalization, essentialization, racialization, exclusion, and invisibility are just some of the oppressions Black females experience throughout their lifetime of schooling. It is important to note that exposing other oppressions can bring empowerment to Black females in education and transform their schooling experiences as well as transform their lives. Furthermore, exploring, calling out, and interrupting inequitable practices and policies against Black females in education can be accomplished by utilizing critical theories to examine the root of educational inequities in schooling experiences. An exploration of inequities in schooling framed by CRF and a lens of intersectionality can interrupt racist, hegemonic, ideals in education through the inclusion of the subjective experiences and voices of Black females. This can help Black female students to enjoy positive schooling experiences and experience quality learning opportunities. With this in mind, regarding the diverse experiences of Black females', this research may unveil considerable variations with challenges to stereotypes as a troubling commonality. Because of the inequities, these students are receiving different learning experiences in schooling based on their ethnicity and their status. Exploring the schooling experiences of Black women by providing them a platform to narrate their everyday schooling

experiences can do multiple things. (a) This could unveil the complexities of the intersections of racism, sexism, and classism (Hill-Collins, 2016). (b) It could reveal how racism, sexism and classism interact with one another and shape the schooling experiences for Black women (Crenshaw, 1989). (c) It could add Black women's voices and unique stories to the academic literature and shine light on the magnitude of oppression experienced in education.

Consequently, highlighting examples of historical and cultural patterns of the role of racism that reproduce modern racial inequalities in education (Evans-Winters, 2005). Analyzing Black women schooling experiences can introduce the reader to salient issues that impacts and influence the day-to-day routines of Black women educationally (Boukari, 2005). Challenging Americas racialized structures by asking questions such as what are some racist practices and racist relationships in education that impede Black female schooling as seen through the narratives of Black women's schooling experiences can unveil the problem of racism in the education system. It is vitally important to add the voices and unique stories of Black women in the academic literature and shine light on the magnitude of oppression they experience while pursuing an education.

This information can potentially be utilized as a tool of empowerment to other Black girls and women and add to the field of African American women studies, Black girlhood studies, Black feminism and Black feminist thought, Intersectionality, African American woman history, Black history, and Urban Studies. When we explore systems of oppression and how they disadvantage marginalized groups in our society, we can then recognize multiple ways marginalized, Black women experience everyday racism and how it is shaped. Placing marginalized students at the center of the analysis can assist with encouraging a researcher's sociological thinking in a way that invokes sensitivity and inclusivity when studying students'

social experiences. When dealing with Black females' schooling experiences Boukari (2005) stated, "One cannot do without mentioning the socio-historical context in which girls were educated, and the Black girl's actions not only to transform education, and economic situation, but also, to impact the general sociopolitical institutions in the U.S." (p. 1). Likewise, Evans- Winters (2005) argued that "various historical and sociopolitical processes have contributed economic and social inequality and that a history of institutional racism and social discrimination has left the majority of Black Americans cemented at the bottom of its economic hierarchy" (p. 53). Equity-oriented pedagogies that acknowledge and examine the specific academic needs of Black female students are also needed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, education is still broken, and we need more research on how to create an equitable path for marginalized, essentialized, and racialized students. Essed (1991) pointed out the harmfulness of everyday manifestations of racism, the reality of tolerance and how there is no legitimate basis for opposition to racism. The everyday reality for Black women in schooling involves the tolerating of racism, conquering racial barriers, overcoming gender obstacles, continually negotiating the educational institutional landscape, navigating confrontations and inequalities, and constantly battling to survive a never-ending attack while schooling in a gigantic, racialized structure.

There are limitations for conceptualizing life experiences of Black women in education and unveiling how their daily life experiences impact how and what they learn. Despite these limitations, there is a need for more scholarship to reinterpret schooling and view schooling processes of Black females. However, acknowledging equity in education

for marginalized students requires rectifying the structure, policies, and practices that contribute to inequitable treatment of marginalized students. Essed (1991) pointed out the harmfulness of everyday manifestations of racism, the reality of tolerance, and how there is no legitimate basis for opposition to racism. It is important to me to acknowledge what a privilege and honor it is to have an opportunity to capture the essence of the phenomenon of Black women oppression in their schooling experience in the narratives of the personal lived experiences and to have their stories as a part of this dissertation. If we can transform the schooling experiences of Black women, we can transform the education of Black girls.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: International Review Board Approval Letter

EASTERN
MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

University Human Subjects Review Committee

Dec 10, 2021 10:55:13 AM EST

Kimberly Dixon-Ferrell
Eastern Michigan University, Teacher Education

Re: Exempt - Initial - UHSRC-FY21-22-123 Transcending Truths: A Phenomenological Study on How Black Women Narrate their Schooling Experiences

Dear Kimberly Dixon-Ferrell:

The Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee has rendered the decision below for Transcending Truths: A Phenomenological Study on How Black Women Narrate their Schooling Experiences. You may begin your research.

Decision: Exempt - Limited IRB

Selected Category: Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Renewals: Exempt studies do not need to be renewed. When the project is completed, please contact human.subjects@emich.edu.

Modifications: Any plan to alter the study design or any study documents must be reviewed to determine if the Exempt decision changes. You must submit a modification request application in [Cayuse IRB](#) and await a decision prior to implementation.

Problems: Any deviations from the study protocol, unanticipated problems, adverse events, subject complaints, or other problems that may affect the risk to human subjects must be reported to the UHSRC. Complete an incident report in [Cayuse IRB](#).

Follow-up: Please contact the [UHSRC](#) when your project is complete.

Please contact human.subjects@emich.edu with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee

Appendix B: Approved Recruitment Letter

From: Kimberly Dixson-Ferrell

Academic Institution: Eastern Michigan

University Title: Doctoral student, Principal
investigator

Advisor/Mentor: Dr. J. Joseph Bishop, EMU, EDST Dept.

Re: Recruitment of participants for investigative research study
project To whom it may concern:

My name is Kimberly Dixson-Ferrell and I am a third-year doctoral student in the PhD Educational Studies program at Eastern Michigan University. One of the criteria's I must meet at this level is to conduct an investigative research study project. My topic is "Transcending Truths: A Phenomenological Study of How Black Women Narrate Their Schooling Experiences"

And I want to interview about 5 Black women who has some work experience. The purpose of the investigative research study is to understand what occurs in the everyday lives of Black women concerning their K-12 schooling experiences by examining their personal lived experiences and exploring the ways in which they narrate their schooling experiences. Literature suggests that these concepts shape the lives Black women and impacts their education as well as their day-to-day lives. These are individual three series interviews, one-hour each interviews surrounding this topic and will be completed each time in one setting. It will be audio/video recordings on Zoom. We will schedule specific days and times that is most convenient for you. You must have internet, wireless access. Access to a cell phone, computer or ipad with the Zoom software application.

In order to participate in this research study, you have to meet these criteria's:

1. Identify as Black, African American, or Afro American.
2. Identify as a woman.
3. Be between the ages of 21-65.
4. Have some work experience.

If you meet all of this criterion, you are eligible to participate in this research study.

The primary benefit to you includes helping predominantly white academic institutions achieve a better understanding of issues confronting Black girls and Black women in K-12 schooling today. Other benefits include bringing new hope for opportunities for Black women's voices to be heard when speaking of personal lived experiences and to be acknowledged as the experts in their stories. This will help future generations of Black girls and Black women to be included in more conversation and research pertaining to social justice and narrating their personal lived experiences. Data collected will be of your racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, socioeconomic status, religious or philosophical belief's, social experiences, experiences related specifically to your gender and educational experience. The recordings and the transcripts will be stored in a password-protected file on my Eastern Michigan University Google- Drive. We will store your information after this project ends, but we may store your information up to five years. If you are interested, please email me at kdixson@emich.edu or call me at 734-802-8072 and I will send you a very detailed consent form that you will have to sign.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Dixon-Ferrell

Appendix C: Approved Consent Form

Project Title: Transcending Truths: A Phenomenological Study of How Black Women Narrate Their Schooling Experiences.

Principal Investigator: Kimberly Dixson-Ferrell, Doctoral Student, Eastern Michigan University.

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Joe Bishop, Professor, Eastern Michigan University

Invitation to participate in research

You are invited to participate in a research study. Participation in research is voluntary.

Please ask any questions you have about participation in this study.

Eligibility Criteria

In order to participate in this study, you must meet these four criteria's:

- Identify as Black, African American, or Afro American.
- Identify as a woman.
- Be between the ages of 21-65.
- Have some work experience.

If you meet all of this criterion, you are eligible to participate in this research study.

Important information about this study

The purpose of the investigative study is to conduct research on the personal lived schooling experiences of Black women in the Midwest region in America. Participation in this study involves a three series interview to last about one hour with each interview recorded on Zoom. I do not foresee that you will suffer any risks and/or any personal discomfort as a result of participating in this investigative study. As the principal investigator, I will protect your confidentiality by documenting your name as a

pseudonym, this pseudonym will be used when describing your personal lived experiences and it will be anonymous. As the investigator, I will be accountable for removing names and any other identifying markers that may inform readers of your true identity. Participation in this research is voluntary. You do not have to participate. If you decide to participate, you can stop at any time. If you decide to stop participating, you have the option to keep the recorded interview sessions or to delete them. You can request either option by way of a verbal or written inquiry.

What is this study about?

The purpose of the investigative research study is to understand what occurs in the everyday schooling experiences in the lives of Black women. I'm particularly interested in examining their personal lived experiences within the context of educational hardships because literature suggests that these concepts shape the role of Black women and impacts their education as well as their day-to-day lives. I am interested in investigating their personal views and perspectives of hardship in school. My intent is to use their personal lived experiences as a basis of examination to understand what some Black women may encounter in their schooling experiences.

What will happen if I participate in this study?

Participation in this study involves: having time set aside to participate in three individual interview sessions lasting about one hour each. Having internet, wireless access. Having access to Zoom, telephony computer application. Having to answer several questions in each recorded session. I would like to audio-video record you for this study. If you are audio-video recorded, it will be possible to identify you through your voice/image. You are not required to have your camera on during these interviews. If you are unable and/or

uncomfortable with your camera being on, you may turn your camera off. This will not disqualify you from participating in this research study. However, if you do not agree to be audio-video recorded, you may not be eligible to participate in this study.

What types of data will be collected?

I will collect data about your racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, socioeconomic status, religious or philosophical beliefs, social experiences, experiences related specifically to your gender, and educational life experiences.

What are the expected risks for participation?

I do not foresee that you will suffer any risks and/or any personal discomfort as a result of participating in the investigative research study. There are no expected physical or psychological risks to participation. The primary risk of participation in this study is a potential loss of confidentiality. Some of the interview questions ask about your personal lived schooling experiences and if they make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer. If you are upset, please inform the investigator immediately. Your information will not be processed by an automated system it will be manually transcribed.

Are there any benefits to participating?

The primary benefit to you includes helping predominantly white academic institutions achieve a better understanding of issues confronting Black women schooling experiences today. Other benefits include bringing new hope for opportunities for Black women's voices to be heard when speaking of personal lived experiences. This will help future generations of Black girls and Black women to be included in more conversation and research pertaining to social justice in education and personal lived schooling experiences.

How will my information be kept confidential?

Your information will be kept confidential in Eastern Michigan University Google-Drive files with your recorded interview session that I only have access to. I plan to publish the results of this study. We will not publish any information that can personally identify you. We would like to publish your information, with your permission. We will ask you to initial a statement at the bottom of this form to give us permission to use your information collected from this interview in publications. Please note that once your information is published, it cannot be removed, even if you are unhappy with the publication. We will keep your information as confidential as possible. To maintain confidentiality in this study again, pseudonyms will be used when describing your personal lived experiences and, it will be anonymous. As the principal investigator, I will be accountable for removing names and any other identifying mechanism that may unveil to the readers your identity.

Confidentiality measures:

The recordings and the transcripts will be stored in a password-protected file on my Eastern Michigan University Google- Drive. We will store your information after this project ends, but we may store your information up to five years. We will make every effort to keep your information confidential, however, we cannot guarantee confidentiality. The principal investigator will have access to the information you provide for research purposes only. Other groups may have access to your research information for quality control or safety purposes. These groups include the University Human Subjects Review Committee, the Office of Research Development, the sponsor of the research, or federal and state agencies that oversee the review of research, including the Office for Human

Research Protections and the Food and Drug Administration. The University Human Subjects Review Committee reviews research for the safety and protection of people who participate in research studies.

Storing study information for future use

We will store your information to study in the future. Your information will be kept in a separate file on Eastern Michigan University Google-Drive and labeled with a code not your name. Your information will be stored in a password-protected file and retain transcripts indefinitely. We may share your information with other researchers without asking for your permission, but the shared information will never contain information that could identify you. We will send your de-identified information by email and only upon request.

Are there any costs to participation?

Participation will not cost you anything.

Is there compensation to participate in this study?

There is no compensation to participate in this study.

Study contact information

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Kimberly Dixson-Ferrell, at kdixson@emich.edu or by phone at 734-802-8072. You can also contact Kimberly's adviser, Dr. Joe Bishop at jbishop3@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3260. For questions about your rights as a research subject, contact the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

Voluntary participation

Participation in this research study is your choice. You may refuse to participate at any time, even after signing this form, without repercussion. You may choose to leave the study at any time without repercussion. If you leave the study, the information you provided will be kept confidential. You may request, in writing, that your identifiable information be destroyed.

However, we cannot destroy any information that has already been published.

Statement of Consent

I have read this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the answers I received. I give my consent to participate in this research study.

Signatures:

_____ I agree to allow information that will not directly identify me to be published.

_____ I agree and understand that my interview sessions will be recorded.

Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all their questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the subject.

Name of Person Obtaining Consent