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The Black Educology Mixtape is an open-access mixtape that moves beyond academic articles to feature various art forms and voices that are typically muted. We feature a collective of Black people working to amplify and empower Black educational voices. Our scope and sequence focus on the past, present, and future of Black education, which has been historically and systemically caught in the underbelly of western education. Our work is grounded in creating mixtapes that are both revolutionary and emancipatory in the name of love, study, struggle, and refusal.

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Let Us Celebrate: Negotiating Black Joy in Academic (Un)Conference Spaces

Nathaniel D. Stewart, J.B. Mayo, Jr.

ABSTRACT

This co-authored piece shares a story about how two Black conference-goers negotiated joy in an (un)conference space. In turn, finding celebration within sometimes volatile, traditional academic conferences. Black Educology scholarship would benefit from more specific investigations into how Black conference-goers celebrate each other across their dynamic identities. We inquire about how a conference session co-facilitator (Nate) and an audience member (JB) negotiated, experienced, and built relationships across their positionalities and roles in the (un)conference space. We interpreted themes from our dialogue, post-session conversations, converged lived experiences, intercollegiate exchanges, symposium planning agendas, and written notes. The three themes, Convergent Social Localities, Blackness as Dynamic, and Stirred Up, inform implications for celebration in Black (un)conference spaces. The conclusion forwards how conference planners may center BlackEducology via for-us-by-us, authenticity, and being.

Introduction

Nate and JB's co-authored piece shares a story examining nuances related to finding and celebrating joy in Black (un)conference spaces. *(Un)conferences* have been described as an alternative space where knowledge contributors reject knowledge gatekeeping, exchange affirmation, center relationship-building, dismantle knower hierarchies, laugh, and learn with each other (Garcia & Cotton, 2020). Undoubtedly, educational research conferences are places that foster and ignite conceptualizations of Black Educology (BE), liberation, and self-determination. BE involves a bricolage of Black people's efforts to amplify Black voices beyond the white gaze. Black Educologists' efforts to co-create liberatory conference spaces vary in scope, aim, and location, but their commonality is in attempts to flip the ways conference attendees relate to and celebrate each other beyond white academic conference norms. Scholars have critiqued academic conferences because of high cost, colonial practices, and knowledge hierarchies (Henderson & Esposito, 2019; Oliver & Morris, 2020). However, these critiques may overlook the intra-racialized experiences of early- and mid-career Black scholars and their transgressive acts. We aim to answer Love's (2023) call to consider how Black conference-goers may engage in "refusal" and render whiteness as "nowhere to be found" in Black liberatory spaces (p. 250). Our refusal centers Black (un)conference spaces and the lived experiences of the co-participants and knowledge contributors within them.

We inquire about how a co-facilitator (Nate) and an audience member (JB) negotiated, experienced, and built relationships across their positionalities and roles in the (un)conference space. Nate, an early-career assistant professor, co-facilitated an American Educational Research Association (AERA) 2023 session titled *The Unapologetic Love of Nuanced Black Joy*. JB, an associate professor, attended Nate's session as a University of Minnesota colleague, fellow brotha, and friend. We methodologically ground our work within conversational paradigms and forward three nuanced multiplexes. The nuanced multiplexes were themes we interpreted from our dialogue, post-session conversations, converged lived experiences, intercollegiate exchanges, and written reflections. We found Black Joy's nuanced multiplexes via our convergent social localities, dynamic Blackness, and attempts in just "be"-ing.

There are two ways this work supports conference organizers in continuing to move academic and educational conferences toward promoting an atmosphere that celebrates Black Joy, laughter, affirmation, and celebration. First, framing Black Joy within its nuance conceptualizes a complex reality. In this reality, Black-identifying conference-goers negotiate what we must collectively shift within the academic conference

apparatus and the extent to which (un)conference spaces can be liberatory. Second, this piece supports educational conference organizers' acts to bolster Black (un)conference spaces.

Black (Un)conference Spaces

Scholarship exploring (un)conference spaces has been scant in dominant educational literature; however, they have a long legacy within Black intellectual thought. An important entry point into Black (un)conference spaces relates to their celebratory role within the broad apparatus of education. Dominant, predominately-white academic conferences can be opportunities for faculty, practitioners, and students to exchange ideas and be in a temporary and in-person community. For instance, there is unquestioned value for Black students to see hundreds of Black faculty, who have successfully earned their PhDs, in one place. Especially for students who may return to their historically white institution where they feel isolated or feel like they are imposters (Doughty & Martin-Parchment, 2023). Simultaneously, dominant academic conferences have ignited many Black liberatory projects, research, program partnerships, and co-writing.

Black educational (un)conference spaces have a legacy being sites of resistance and sustainment juxtaposed to oppressive academic conferences. W. E. B. DuBois' efforts to organize the Atlanta Conference of Negro Problems, from 1896–1914, emulated how bringing people together under the goal of redressing white supremacy held immense impact (Lee, 2022). Hopps et al. (2021) have shown how DuBois's (un)conference space paved the way for future Black sociologists and social workers in Georgia. The past-present connection emulates how transgressive conference spaces may support, prepare, and invite scholars to historically exclusionary fields. Moreover, Mills (2015) has historicized conferencing as a site of mobilization in Black feminist social movements. Undoubtedly, Black-organized alternatives to dominant academic conferences have been utilized within Black intellectual spaces. Our piece extends the legacies of Black scholars who have dreamed of celebratory and (un)conference spaces within the educational research apparatus.

Black Intercollegiate Exchanges

Academic conferences have been shown to lead to new collaborations across institutions (Zajdela, 2021). Scholars may connect based on presented work or informal conversations throughout conference events. Moreover, Black conference-goers may be met with collegiate dynamics. These dynamics may manifest as wait-your-turn logics, a failure of scholars to bring others with them as they climb, or differences in Black liberation strategies (Clark et al., 2018; Luedke, 2020). Additionally, there are experience-related dynamics between early-career scholars and mid- and final-third-career scholars. One of these differences is in the number of academic educational conferences attended as a faculty member. Holding the faculty or academic label may come with being more involved in leadership, more pressure to find aligned interests, and institution-related responsibilities. Understandably, faculty from the same institution may attempt to support each other's presentations, introduce them to colleagues beyond their shared institution, or just hang out together in a different setting. Black faculty from the same institution may find academic conferences to be an additional opportunity to connect with each other beyond their home campus. This opportunity is especially attractive given the weight and feeling of white surveillance at their home institutions (Fields & Cunningham-Williams, 2021). Unequivocally, academic conferences have been known as places that foster Black intercollegiate exchanges.

Black Joy at Conferences

Black Joy has been understood as a paradigmatic shift toward understanding knowledge co-creation, and its mobilization, as a relational, nuanced, and negotiated act (Cooper, 2018; Love, 2023). In academic conferences, Black Joy has stemmed from the "I'm rooting for everyone Black" stance (Variety, 2017). This means that we may feel a sense of joy when Black scholars are elected to leadership positions, honored with an award, or speak truth in a panel presentation. We laugh together when we share similar experiences related to someone saying something off-base at a session, attending receptions for free food, building community at happy hours, and aligning our schedules to make sure we show up together. However, the continued perpetuation of anti-Blackness can jeopardize

these feelings (Okello, 2024). Black scholars have identified dominant conferences, extensions of broader academe, as sites of harassment, tokenism, and knowledge gatekeeping (Bell et al., 2021). What our *Black Educology* track offers is a transgressive exploration into the potential of Black co-created, (un)conference spaces and their potential to negotiate Black Joy and celebration in its nuance.

Our literature review sets up an inquiry into how two Black colleagues experienced the unapologetic love of nuanced Black joy in an (un)conference space. Our findings address a paradigmatic shift in how educational conferences are organized. In turn, Black conference-goers may continue to negotiate pathways to experience joy in our knowledge co-creation.

Co-Authors' Positionalities

Nate and JB have so many commonalities; however, their journeys to understanding their Blackness, or Africa(ness), are different. Nate, a Black Jamaican American man with a white mother, often writes and speaks about his childhood racialized identity navigation. His K–12 journey was inundated with educators who he felt did not see or value his intellect. He can remember teachers who would tell his mother, “Nathan [his childhood name] will never do better than a C average” or educators would take books that they perceived to be too difficult for him out of his hands. The healing began when his increased consciousness and studies began to expose white supremacist logics. His intellectual awakening came from a (re)connection to his African ancestors through intellectualizing Black educational resistance (Stewart, 2022). Then, Nate took his ancestral gifts and poured them into Black students as a middle school science teacher. As a current assistant professor, he describes his work as having an unapologetic focus on bolstering the political and pedagogical activities of Black educators, school leaders, and their allies (Stewart, 2023).

JB identifies as a Black gay man from the South, coming from a small town in Virginia where he and his family have lived for five generations on land they acquired in the 1880s. A generation older than Nate, his understanding of Blackness came directly from his parents and grandparents, who were forced to navigate the dangerous terrain of the Jim Crow era. JB’s grandfather gave his 12-year-old son (JB’s dad) a 12-gauge shotgun when Emmitt Till was lynched in 1945 to keep “those Crackers” at bay. Family stories like this raised JB’s racial awareness from an early age; however, this was coupled with strong encouragement to fit into existing white power structures so that he could learn their secrets to success. Mistakenly interpreting these messages to mean assimilating and subsequently deeply internalizing them, JB sought out and excelled in educational and social spaces most often occupied by white people and, many times, at the expense of forming deep relationships with Black peers. Only in recent years has JB begun to realize the problematic (and traumatic) nature of being racially tokenized throughout his life and being perceived as safe or “one of the good ones.” As a result, he welcomes opportunities to fully integrate the convergences of Blackness and queerness in his future scholarship.

Across Nate and JB’s journeys, there are many convergent and divergent experiences that have been negotiated in conversations beyond campus discussions. These collegiate and relational conversations were the foundation for JB’s interest in supporting Nate’s AERA 2023 presentation. In fact, JB mentioned he may have overlooked the title of the session if he hadn’t known Nate was a co-presenter. Before they met at the University of Minnesota (UMN), Nate’s and JB’s names had been mentioned to each other because of their shared identities as Black men. It is well-known that full-time Black faculty make up about 3% of all tenure-track positions (Grandison et al., 2022), with male-identifying professors making up half the 3%. Given the low number of Black male tenure-track faculty, the authors agreed to meet, despite having concerns about non-Black folks who seemed so eager for them to connect. Nate wanted to learn from a more experienced scholar in a different department. JB was interested in building community with other Black faculty because it can feel siloed at UMN. Nate entered AERA 2023 as an early-career scholar at the end of his first year as an assistant professor. The AERA 2023 conference was JB’s 15th as a faculty member.

Conference Symposium Context

Nate and his co-presenters wanted their AERA 2023 symposium session to be different from traditional academic presentations. One co-presenter said “let’s take off the mask” in their first planning meeting. This phrase symbolized the exclusive and performative nature of academic spaces. Nate and his co-presenters wanted to create a space where Black people could be their authentic selves in an (un)conference space and share the complexities of their relationship to joy. The planning notetaker wrote,

Some audience interaction? We could do a meditation about Rest; Naming how academic “scholarship” may not always be joyous; Opening space to center Black joy; “Rest as Resistance.”

The AERA conference’s keynote had a positive impact on the symposium’s facilitation because Nate and his co-presenters felt emboldened in their co-planning decisions. The AERA’s keynote address was delivered by the Reverend Dr. Cornel West. The co-presenters joked about how fortuitous it was for Dr. West to give the keynote address as they planned to host their (un)conference space. Dr. West is well known for his critique of academia and his unapologetic love of Blackness. Nate and his co-presenters felt affirmed by Dr. West’s words. They found joy in his references to his origins from the “chocolate side of Sacramento” and his pursuit of generating “love warriors.” The most relevant comments related to academics and comments on joy. Nate’s post-conference notes referenced Dr. West’s analogy of the “academic peacock.” An academic peacock looks pretty and has vibrant colors, but they cannot fly. What Dr. West meant is that there is vast intellectualism that happens beyond exclusive academic spaces, especially when it comes to topics of love and joy. Nate and his co-presenters began to use “don’t be a peacock” in jest. They channeled their laughter and affirmation into a more emboldened sense of purpose in preparing for their Black (un)conference space.

These contexts are important because they informed how Nate and his co-presenters co-facilitated the symposium and Black (un)conference space. Their Black (un)conference space involved a guided meditation, reciprocal conversation design, the start of co-creating a Black Joy manifesto, and a concluding affirmation. This Black-led (un)conference space was the context for Nate and JB’s knowledge co-creation.

Data Entry Points

The data entry points for this piece stem from our dialogue, post-session conversations, converged lived experience, intercollegiate exchanges, symposium planning agendas, and written notes from AERA 2023. JB wrote a reflection on his thoughts and feelings regarding the symposium shortly after returning home from Chicago. This reflection was the major informant in interpreting themes, or nuanced multiplexes. JB was so moved by the session that he “needed” to share his thoughts with Nate. Never in other conference spaces had he felt so moved, so emotionally stirred, by what the presenters and participants shared. Even in those rare (un)conference spaces that he had participated in at conferences other than AERA, JB had not felt the wave of emotion that had consumed him during and for multiple days after Nate’s and his co-presenters’ session at AERA. More important than the emotions he felt, JB had never felt so compelled to *act* differently and more intentionally consider research centered on Black experiences. JB scheduled an off-campus meetup to discuss these deep feelings with Nate and then sent a revision of his original thoughts based on that conversation. JB’s writing activities and efforts to co-reflect on the symposium with Nate are important data entry points that inform our findings.

Knowledge Co-Creation

Our analytical approach is grounded in relational (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017; Stewart & Thompson, 2023) and conversational methodologies (Kovach, 2010; Obaizamomwan-Hamilton et al., 2022). Reflective dialogue, relationship building, and storied experiences were central to knowledge co-creation and sense-making. Nate and JB’s sense-making took place at the convergence of collegial conversation and Black, kitchen-table talk

approaches because of our positionalities as colleagues and friends. Acosta and Hayes (2018) used a “narrated collegial conversation” over soul food as an approach to illuminate nuance and challenge objective paradigms (p. 4). Their collegial conversations help situate our knowledge creation in specific temporal and relational contexts. Bolding et al. (2022) have conceptualized “kitchen-table talks” as an approach that can happen anywhere, maintain relationships, respond to urgency, and be a place of transformation (p. 9). Kitchen-table talks connect to JB and Nate’s conversations because dialogue stemmed from situating ourselves as family within and beyond the predominately white institution where they work. In turn, their reflections and validations stemmed from the collaborative, duo-ethnographic nature of knowledge creation (Chang, 2013). Nate and JB’s work connects with these relational and conversational methodologies because their findings were interpreted from the nuances in how conversations, stories, listening and reflective discourse contextualize social phenomena.

Nuanced Multiplexes (Findings)

We frame our findings as nuanced multiplexes because the paradigm promotes centering complexity. Too often, knowledge creation practices may surrender complexities in pursuit of generalizability (Fine, 2006). However, a nuanced multiplex acknowledges how people and their stories have infinitely complex contexts that guide thoughts, actions, and beliefs. We offer our findings as themes contextual to Nate and JB’s relationships to each other and how they made sense of their shared experience in the Black (un)conference space.

Convergences of Social Localities

The *Convergences of Social Localities* multiplex borrows and extends the knowledge contributions of Kimberly Crenshaw and bell hooks. Crenshaw (2013) has written extensively about the convergence of how oppressive systems disadvantage Black women at the intersection of their womanhood and Blackness. Crenshaw’s centering of Black women’s lived experiences has helped legal scholars and later educational researchers (Taylor et al., 2023), understand how the white supremacist and patriarchal system has differentiated impacts on people based on identity. bell hooks (2000) has helped scholars extend this work to consider how colonialism and capitalism are additional convergent forces in the ways systems disadvantage people who are marginalized, dispossessed, and oppressed. Thus, a person’s *social localities* name their structural-level situatedness within systems of oppression.

The *Convergences of Social Localities* was interpreted from JB’s written reflection and session co-facilitators’ planning decisions. Previous to the Black Joy symposium, JB had participated in another AERA conference paper session. The following excerpt emulates how Nate and JB considered their situatedness across all their social localities.

JB Reflection Excerpt: I left that session feeling torn about NOT centering my Blackness more in queer spaces, and here I was seated between a Black Woman and a queer white person...Perhaps this coincidental seating is what started my insides to stir as I had literally felt this tension between my Blackness and my queerness earlier at the conference. I am known for my scholarship on queer-centered topics and I found the coming out process to be challenging for many reasons. But here I am in this place of mid-career, tenured, respected, and “gay for pay” and I wonder if folks even see me as a “real” Black man. Childhood and young adulthood traumas flow to the surface of being overly educated and “too white.”

Some Black queer folxs have described the harm experienced from unhealthy socializations of Black masculinity. Black queer scholarship has traced these unhealthy masculinity frameworks as a product of interlocking systems of oppression (Hall, 2016). To challenge symposium participants’ potential feelings of exclusion, Nate and his co-presenters were intentional about centering the experiences of queer, Black, and femme folxs as they planned the session. In their proposal, they wrote about how the AERA session “connects to millions of Black, Brown,

Indigenous, queer, or feminist teachers who choose instructional practices that illuminate societal oppression and teach students to see their role in transformation” (Stewart et al., 2022, p. 2) Additionally, some of the co-presenters identify under the queer umbrella themselves, which they shared in the symposium session. Foundationally, co-presenters were unapologetic about bringing their whole selves to the symposium planning conversations and audience members may have felt this unapologetic stance.

The feelings from the Black joy session matriculated beyond the session walls. JB felt affirmed in his Blackness and queerness as he transitioned back to the usual, predominantly-white spaces at AERA. He wrote,

As usual in these predominantly-white spaces, it feels as if my attention is required and that I cannot just “be.” I have to be “on,” and they (white people) want to engage with me. Despite all I have said about my feelings within the Black joy session, it was SO nice not to stand out as the only Black person in the room.

JB noticed a difference between the Black (un)conference space and the predominantly white conference space. The difference was in his sense of his ability to be his authentic self across his social localities.

Blackness as Dynamic

The *Blackness as Dynamic* nuanced multiplex stemmed from Nate and JB’s common, yet unique positionalities as Black men and how we came to know joy. Nate and JB interpreted Blackness as Dynamic as they conversed about the nuanced ways Black people, at the convergence of their social localities, come to know joy.

The first conversational evidence stems from a discussion facilitation strategy that was negotiated one hour before the Black Joy symposium. Nate and his co-presenters collectively decided to finalize discussion plans over coffee the morning before the session. One of the liveliest discussions related to how to pre-plan for the likelihood of people racialized as white taking up too much space in our Black Joy session. As a graduate student, Nate had been in academic conference spaces where people racialized as white tended to shift Black-centered conversation to focus on what white people can do to be more anti-racist. Often, the impetus is their sense of not being the focus of discussion that leads to this inquiry. However, two of Nate’s co-presenters, who are educational practitioners and mostly work with white educators, pushed Nate to think about how self-righteousness may miss opportunities to educate a predominantly white teaching force and reduce the harm to which they subject Black students. Ultimately, the presentation team agreed on a plan to name the purpose of this space and compassionately remind participants to decenter whiteness.

JB was not present for the morning coffee discussion. Nevertheless, he felt the impact of Nate and his co-presenters’ negotiation across their dynamism.

JB Reflection Excerpt: Soon thereafter another facilitator spoke and set the ground rules of the session. His words were something to the effect: Let’s remember why we are here. This is a welcoming space but this is about Black joy. If you identify as white [he didn’t say that exactly, but it was clearly understood] we invite you to decenter yourself and (essentially) keep quiet. WOW! I had never heard anything like this before, and I found myself looking around the room to see how the white bodies might respond. I didn’t see any visible changes in that moment...but there were several Black and Brown folks sitting there nodding their heads in agreement. I really liked this ...This was OUR space and it was so powerful for the facilitator to make that fact so explicitly transparent ... and without any ill-will. “Know your place, white people.”

Aspects of JB’s written reflection indicated his internal navigation with a story, from one of the younger Black audience members, that did not resonate with him.

As the facilitator had reminded us, I heard some things that did not resonate with me (sometimes you gotta get a little mean) but I appreciated all the stories that were shared.

Nate and JB discussed the “sometimes you gotta get a little mean” comment in one of their post-session conversations. To Nate, the knowledge contributor and audience member was discussing the limitations of respectability politics, or the idea that Black people are told to avoid confrontation by delicately framing their disdain for white supremacy. What was significant to Nate was that this person was one of the youngest in the room. Nate resonated with the frustration of respectability politics as a young professor. The outcome of Nate and JB’s reflective conversation resulted in a mutual understanding that there is a nuanced multiplex in our dynamic ways of maneuvering place and space.

Stirred Up

JB’s “stirred” feelings came up multiple times in conversation with Nate and his written reflection. The *Stirred Up* nuanced multiplex describes how the unapologetically Black (un)conference space felt different than other academic conference experiences. In turn, the knowledge created in the space reverberated beyond the conference room walls. JB wrote, “I left that session feeling stirred up inside,” in reference to the inward reflection that would be on his horizon. He continued to describe how his stirred feelings reverberated beyond the Black Joy session conversation.

Later in the conference, I met up with [Name of scholar], a rising Black scholar in social studies education, my chosen field, and we chatted about many things, BUT I made it a point to share with him my stirring stomach following the Black Joy session. He shared that he wished that he had been there. As I sat there retelling some of what I have shared here, I felt a connection with him that was real. Granted, we had connected on other things before, but my retelling of my experience brought us even closer, at least I feel as if it did. Part of what I think resonated with [Name of scholar] is when I shared that the session on Black Joy seemed to push me toward leaning into my Blackness more ... in my writing, in my daily living ... but I also shared that these feelings had surfaced before, but they [the feelings] were never this palpable.

The stirred feelings led JB to share his experiences with other Black people in his life. Then, unpacking Black Joy’s complexities with them led to JB feeling “even closer” to them. JB mentions in his reflection revision that he shared his experiences with his older sister and they spent a significant amount of time discussing his stirred feelings. Again, JB felt like this conversation brought him closer to his sister and he names this closeness as “another form of Black Joy.”

Discussion

The discussion of our nuanced multiplexes implicates Black Educology, liberation, and self-determination in (un)conference spaces. Moreover, our implications for intercollegiate interactions may help Black attendees negotiate joy at the convergence of their social localities. Each discussion implication builds across our three nuanced multiplexes.

Unapologetically For Us, By Us

The BE of (un)conference spaces involved the intentional co-creation of spaces for Black people, by Black people. Nate and his co-presenters intentionally, foundationally, and from-the-start situated and negotiated the (un)conference space to be unapologetically Black centered. We, the co-authors, make connections to how Love (2023) has described hush harbors because the historical context illuminates how Black freedom-seekers circumvented enslavement in pursuit of joy. Hush harbors were places where enslaved Black people escaped violent realities to “worship, mourn, sing, scream, dance, and in those moments find joy and freedom” (p. 251). Hush harbors and Black (un)conference spaces may hold an ancestral connection. The ancestral connection is evident in how JB felt the unapologetic-Black centering and this led to co-creating space to negotiate joy. Nate and his co-presenters demonstrated the negotiation in their early-morning discussion about practically setting their space

beyond white gazes. Indeed, the co-presenters' negotiation process resulted in recognizing and remembering the significance of certain utterances and discovering untapped (emotional) spaces, memories, and points of connection among audience members. In other words, the intentionality of the space—including the explicit instructions to white attendees to remember who this space was for—may have made it easier for Black conference-goers to find and express joy.

Authenticity

BE in (un)conference spaces may require co-facilitation decisions that promote authenticity. JB, as a session attendee, felt that being in the company of others who were invested, vulnerable, and honest made it more possible to find joy. From the moment he entered the room and found others deeply engaged in the mindfulness meditation activity, it was apparent that Nate and his co-facilitators had created a different kind of conference space. Here, attendees felt comfortable sharing uncomfortable truths about themselves and the experiences they had back at their home institutions. Love argues that BE and its abolitionist tenets are “deeply personal and rooted in how we care for each other” (p. 256). Care is mechanized through a shared centering of Blackness in its dynamism. Even when some session attendees' authenticity may have caused others a bit of discomfort, this signaled a degree of candor that one rarely experiences in the polite atmosphere normed in the more traditional conference spaces (Bell et al., 2021). JB felt that attendees did not feel compelled to conform to white academic norms and pretend their Black experiences had to be tempered to find understanding and acceptance in this (un)conference space. The authentic Black space felt comfortable in negotiating the multiple and infinite ways of being, experiencing, and knowing.

Sense of “BE”-ing

BE in (un)conference spaces demands a sense of just “be”-ing. Too often, academic conferences have norms that require constant vigilance and performance. Nate and his co-presenters designed a session where attendees could “take off the mask” and refuse to be “peacocks.” A sense of just “be”-ing stemmed from JB's feeling that he could truly drop his shoulders and let his guard down. He named the Black (un)conference space's support for his ability to just “be” made it more feasible to find joy. There was something in him that “stirred” and shook his traditional sense of academic space. An intentional turn toward “be”-ing may hold implications to refuse what Oliver and Morris (2020) called “(dis)-belonging” or the sense of outsider-ness that cripples Black imagination (p. 770). When conference organizers make decisions about sessions, speakers, events, schedule, review processes, and other logistics, they may consider how For Us, By Us, Authentic, and “Be”ing may improve Black conference-goers' experiences. In turn, contributing to the sustainment of BE in the academic spaces that Black scholars continue to transgress.

Conclusion

We want to conclude the piece with arguably the most descriptive Black Joy excerpt within JB's written reflection. The excerpt represents and summarizes how BE may manifest itself in Black (un)conference spaces and transgress academic conferences. JB wrote,

I loved seeing the smiles from people, and especially those stories shared by Black women, and slowly my shoulders dropped, I felt less tension, and found myself enjoying the people in the room. I don't recall one particular story that took me there, but there was a theme of self-care that stood out and there's something particularly wonderful when Black folks refer to “our babies” that is so moving. My tension was easing ... I found myself laughing ... I found myself uttering those noises of approval that come deep from within when I heard something familiar to a past Black experience. It was lovely!

Then, days later, after talking with Nate at dinner and sharing his experiences with his loved ones, JB contemplated,

Was this the joy coming out of me? As I continue to think about those moments, it makes me smile all these days later.

And, after several rounds of editing this manuscript and almost one year since the symposium, Nate still gets chills reading JB's reflection. We, Black people, should continue to negotiate the meaning, purpose, and impact of joy. Concurrently, the smiles and chills that have manifested from Nate's and JB's co-reflections are quintessential examples of Black joy.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on Contributors

Nathaniel (Nate) D. Stewart is a former middle school science teacher, Black liberatory pedagogist, and assistant professor of education, policy, and leadership. His knowledge-creation activities explore Black, justice-oriented, and K-12 educators' unique roles as policy activists and Black student agency shepherds. His inquiry is guided by critical quantification, anti-colonial epistemologies, and Black Critical Theory, purposed to bolster the political and pedagogical activities of Black educators, school leaders, and their allies.

J.B. Mayo, Jr. is an associate professor of social studies education and coordinator of the Teacher-Scholars of Color Program. A former middle school social studies teacher in Virginia, J.B. grounds his work in school spaces. His research elevates the inclusion of queer histories in standard social studies curriculum; it highlights students' identity formation in *Genders & Sexuality Alliances (GSAs)*; and it focuses on the intersections of racialized identities and sexual orientation.

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