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Endarkened Joy: A Black Woman's Critical Autoethnography of (Re)Membering Self Through Generational Tales of Spirituality, Social (In)Justice, and Education

Rhemma D. Payne
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Walden University
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Abstract

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by

Rhemma D. Payne

MA, Liberty University, 2015

MS, Indiana University, 2010

BS, Indiana University, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision

Walden University

August 2022

Abstract

Counselor education lacks representation and visibility of Black women and women of color scholars and professionals despite ongoing efforts to promote cultural diversity and inclusion within the field. Researchers have explored the externalized stereotypes of identity for Black women; however, little is known about the internalized beliefs of these stereotypical identities and the impact on advocacy and (un)wellness in academic settings. The purpose of this critical autoethnography was to present an insider's view of a Black woman's nuanced experiences of internalization of stereotypes while completing a counselor education doctoral program. Using an endarkened feminist onto-epistemological framework to guide the research, data collection included personal (re)collections, artifacts, and two storyteller interviews compiled into critical tales to illustrate generational knowledge of Black womanhood, education, spirituality, and social justice. The following themes emerged from a meta-analysis: (a) (re)defining wholeness of identity, with three subthemes, honoring generational wisdom, witnessing maternal resilience, and (re)securing a sense of belonging; (b) (re)engaging advocacy as an expression of spirituality, with two subthemes, reconciling generational advocacy and negotiating the politics of spirituality; and (c) (re)learning endarkened joy through creative expression, with two subthemes, enduring the process of looking inward to find truth and expressing truth in safe spaces as a practice of wellness. The findings in this study offer critical and analytical interpretations that have implications for increasing culturally congruent advocacy practices of resistance and wellness to promote positive social change.

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Dedication

For Gay-Gay, who has passed on from this life yet has continued to shape my understanding of life and, thus, influenced my approach to this study. For your life and love, I am grateful to find my way back to the tenets you instilled in me years ago.

For Mom, thank you for always cheering me on, no matter what lofty goal I shared with you. From retreats to moving to pursuing a doctoral degree, your belief carries me through tough moments and encourages me to believe in myself against all odds.

To my storytellers, thank you for helping me (re)member myself and trusting me with your words in confidence. I hope our time together helped bring you as much clarity as it did for me.

For Black mothers and daughters, Black grandmothers and granddaughters, this research is dedicated to your work, seen and unseen, to the joy and pain, soothed and unsoothed, and the booming sound of your voices, sung and unsung. May your joy be full and overflowing in abundance always.

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Chapter 1: (Re)Cognizing Endarkened Joy

When we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed. But when we are silent, we are still afraid. So it is better to speak. — Audre Lorde

Introduction

Stereotypic tropes of Black women have dominated narratives and portrayals of Black women in media, with representations of strength, resilience, and fortitude at the cost of pain, strife, difficulty, and hardship. At the heart of this strife, and often unrecognized, is a tension Black women experience between occupying multiple cultural identities like race and gender, and the expectations held within these stereotypes that affirm one or the other (Thomas et al., 2004). Black women represent intersecting identities from several marginalized cultural groups, and this impacts their experiences of oppression while they seek doctoral degrees. Robinson et al. (2019) noted that these negative experiences can significantly impact wellness, professional development, and efforts toward increasing diversity among counselor educators within higher education institutions.

Current literature in related fields like health care have addressed the negative impact of the externalized perception and experience of the strong Black woman (SBW) and how these stereotypic tropes can impede physical and mental health outcomes for Black women (Domingue, 2015; Jacobs & Davis, 2017). However, there is limited research on the negative impact of internalized beliefs held by Black women that support stereotypes in various professional settings like graduate study. More specifically, there is a lack of research on how internalized stereotypes of identity (ISIs) may interfere with

progress during doctoral study and furthermore may impact levels of stress and anxiety among doctoral students. Further, researchers examining these experiences have only begun to venture into methodological research designs that incorporate cultural ways of knowing and being, as in designs that consider the diverse ways of studying such phenomena within intersecting cultural identities. To move toward culturally responsive ways of conducting research, I intertwined my study design with my conceptual framework and supported by theoretical tenets that emphasize the power of storytelling, (re)claiming one's voice as way of joyful resistance against oppressive structures, and the communal benefit of truth telling for dissemination throughout academia and beyond.

In this chapter, I will describe the background, definitions, nature, and significance of my study. Further, I connect my rationale from my research problem, purpose, and subsequent research questions that I sought to answer in my study. Additionally, I provide an overview of the endarkened feminist conceptual framework that guided my research study. Lastly, I address the scope and delimitations and limitations for my study.

Background

Students of color, including Black women, in graduate degree programs have shown interest in postgraduate professions like teaching and research; however, their experiences during graduate studies can significantly alter their decision to pursue academic careers (Fang et al., 2016). As such, many researchers call for careful inspection of how these experiences impact representations of Black women in academia and increasing attrition and pursuit of careers in academic settings among this population

(Acosta, 2019; Overstreet, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019; Shavers & Moore, 2019).

Counselor education and supervision (CES) programs in particular would benefit from a greater understanding of the challenges of Black women in doctoral programs experience that may deter their professional development as educators and researchers. The CES field would benefit from the implications found from supporting studies that seek to explore these experiences in ways that illuminate problem areas to address lack of cultural diversity and cultural responsiveness.

Black women face challenges related to racial and gendered stereotypes, microaggressions, and discrimination while pursuing degrees in higher education (Robinson et al., 2019; Watson-Singleton, 2017). Oppression within society is upheld in numerous ways: internally and externally, systematically, and historically. Within academic spaces, Black women have reported these challenges cause stress while they are completing their studies and these challenges often interfere with their pursuit of careers in higher education. My rigorous investigation into the existing literature uncovered several gaps in research, including inquiry into internalization of the SBW and angry Black woman (ABW) identities and mental health and Black women's experiences. Due to a perception regarding lack of support, internalization of stereotypes can reinforce Black women's aversion to seeking support and can prolong interventions to support Black women (Robinson et al., 2019).

One gap in the research is understanding the impact of ABW or SBW identities for Black women nearing the end of their doctoral studies. Researchers should explore Black women's perceptions of barriers they may encounter postgraduation (Acosta, 2019;

Dickens et al., 2018; Grant & Ghee, 2015; Nelson et al., 2016). These barriers may influence Black women's ISIs within the CES profession, which could impact interest of professions across the five CES domains: teaching, supervision, clinical practice, leadership and advocacy, and research. For my study, I primarily explored my ISI as a Black woman doctoral student and its impact on my (un)wellness and academic presence in specific CES domains like leadership and advocacy.

There is limited research regarding ISIs at the intersections of race and gender for Black women in doctoral studies navigating multiple identity structures (i.e., racial identity development, sociocultural and sociopolitical identities, and professional identity). Understanding these complexities is necessary to support Black women pursuing doctorate degrees. Researchers have identified four archetypes of the Black woman portrayed in media and historical retellings that inform the experiences reported by Black women—Mammy, Sapphire, Jezebel, and Superwoman; these archetypes have yet to be explored within academic culture (Thomas et al., 2004). Many researchers have explored the adverse impact of the externalized perception of the SBW stereotype in various settings in the existing literature; however, researchers have yet to explore the impact of internalized oppression for Black women enrolled in doctoral programs.

Black feminist scholars and endarkened feminist researchers have supported tenets related to the individuality of experiences and the importance of individuality and amplification of underrepresented voices as central to social change in research and subsequently in systems where oppressive practices exist, especially for Black women (Domingue, 2015; Porter et al., 2020). Researchers have shown representation of Black

women narrating and telling their own stories, which has added significant richness to existing data (Boylorn, 2016; Dillard, 2012). In the existing literature, researchers have explored the ways in which Black women create an academic presence while also seeking coping resources like mentorship (Fang et al., 2016; Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018; Peters & Miles Nash, 2021).

Stereotypical tropes like the SBW identity are harmful to Black women, as the trope supports the notion that Black women can take on much more than their counterparts with little or no need for support (Davis & Brown, 2017; Griffin, 2016; Watson-Singleton, 2017). There are opportunities for interventions in the CES field for Black women pursuing doctorates that may help reinforce wellness and increase attention toward social change needs for marginalized students and new professionals in academia. Culturally inclusive counselor educators need to understand how to recognize and respond to the diverse needs and challenges of cultural groups like Black women. This would lead to positive social change in academic culture and promote health and wellness within the counseling profession. Researchers have indicated a need to explore how experiences within academic settings impact Black women's internalized beliefs of stereotypical identities (Acosta, 2019; Balkin et al., 2018; Dickens et al., 2018; Domingue, 2015).

There is a dearth of research into Black women's experiences with internalized stereotypes and how this impacts their wellness and academic presence within educational settings like doctoral programs. Particularly absent is research into understanding how internalized messages about intersecting identities contribute to

(un)wellness for Black women and their professional identity development in CES doctoral programs. Wellness (and unwellness) can describe experiences within the domains of mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health. This gap in the research is detrimental to the advancement of the counseling field, particularly crucial for promoting cultural responsiveness within counselor education and supervision profession.

I aimed to fill the research gap by providing insights into my experiences as a methodological and conceptual landscape by which to replicate similar studies that take specific forms of inquiry below the surface and inform expanding knowledge into cultural ways of knowing and being (onto-epistemologies). My research included a thorough process of analysis that can help inform social justice-oriented research that aims to dismantle forms of systemic oppression from every angle. I assumed the role of researcher and research participant simultaneously to inform ethical research practices and guide the CES field into territory that is culturally responsive and innovative. More specifically, I focused on the inner workings of my thoughts and beliefs about self as I navigated my way through 2020, living as a Black, Christian woman nearing the end of my doctoral journey.

In summary, there is a gap in research regarding ISIs held by Black women related to intersecting identities, the impact on mental health or wellness, and developing professional identities within academic spaces, particularly from the perspectives of Black women attending CES doctoral programs at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). In Chapter 2, I will present a review of literature that highlights important concepts related to internalized oppression, academic presence, and (un)wellness

practices for Black women. More specifically, I share research presented from an endarkened Black feminist lens, and review literature that has influenced my research design.

Problem Statement

Black women enrolled in graduate programs experience unique stressors related to race and gender; these stressors exacerbate issues that impact attrition and passage into academia and other institutional sectors (Fang et al., 2016; Griffin, 2016). There are several stereotypical tropes of Black women that focus on strength and represent a formidable resilience that assumes Black women can withstand obstacles no matter the hardship (Thomas et al., 2004). Furthermore, Black women are praised for overcoming these challenges alone and in the absence of attending to their own needs (Thomas et al., 2004). These stereotypic tropes inform the questions of understanding the wellness impact of internalizing this perception of strength and how this internalization may impact behaviors and mannerisms within academic settings. Further, the intersectionality of race and gender for Black women present challenges that are both externalized (i.e., microaggressions, discrimination) and internalized (i.e., racial identity, gender roles).

Another intersection of identity relates to socioeconomic status and class, which can be linked to educational status. My review of literature alluded to the possibility of an amalgam of multiple ISIs that emerge in different settings, like academia, in forms that necessitate an exploration of the evolution of the EBW stereotype (Domingue, 2015). The EBW combines elements of the SBW and ABW that are outwardly represented in the

mainstream, but rarely understood on the internalized or introspective way of being (Collins, 2009; Geyton et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2004).

The problem addressed in this qualitative research study was the ISI related to intersections of race and gender held by Black women and how ISIs impact Black women's experiences with academic presence and (un)wellness while pursuing doctoral degrees at PWIs. Additionally, I examined the impact that ISI (i.e., SBW) has on influencing the representation of Black women's role in social justice as recognized through the lens of leadership and advocacy roles within the CES profession. Lastly, I explored creative pathways to beginning critical discourse regarding ISIs in cross-cultural settings toward implications for future methods in CES praxis and research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this critical autoethnography was to explore how I, as a Black woman, have navigated merging fragmented parts of myself to inform my professional identity as a counselor educator through negotiations of culturally situated experiences of race, gender, intersectionality, creativity, and spirituality while completing my doctoral degree.

Research Question

My research question was: What are the experiences of (un)wellness of a Black woman while managing the intersections of ISI, academic presence, spirituality, and social (in)justice while earning her doctorate degree in a CES program?

My research subquestion was: How do multiple generations of Black women define, describe, and endorse experiences of ISI through the lens of Black womanhood, spirituality, education, and social (in)justice?

Nature of the Study

Far too often, the process of discovering self-identity is a direct result of discovering how others see an individual, which excludes useful experiences that autoethnographers call *insider perspectives* that can enhance the knowledge of a certain phenomenon being studied (Adams et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2011). Using a methodology that does not allow my experiences as a means of inquiry would be incongruent with my onto-epistemology. Therefore, I found alignment with methods that reflect the use of the *internal gaze*—my ability to look inward for answers and not solely rely on information from those with an outside view of my culture to provide insights and answers for my experiences. Further, I am unable to completely remove myself from the research process; I am a Black woman and thus would be more liable to incorporate my own experiences within the research.

Second, the use of autoethnography as a method allows me to embrace the use of self as researcher and participant and acknowledge the inherent bias that requires an ethnographic focus to determine measure of goodness. Lastly, autoethnography researchers and Black feminist scholars have discussed the powerful impact of using the internal gaze for self-reflection and growth, particularly when used to provide a cultural lens that promotes critical discourse and social change (Adams et al., 2015; Boylorn & Orbe, 2016, 2021; Collins, 2009; Ellis, 2004). For these reasons, I selected critical

autoethnography as the methodology for this study because of its alignment with an endarkened feminist research lens.

In this study, I used autoethnographic narratives, herein referred to as *critical tales* (CTs), to center issues of internalized stereotypes, (un)wellness, spirituality, and Black womanhood through an intersectional and critical lens. Therefore, I decided to include semistructured storyteller interviews conducted with two Black women on the maternal side of my family to inform my CTs. While the use of interviews in addition to personal (re)collections has been used in autoethnography (Ellis, 2004), it is important to note this inclusion is a modification to critical autoethnography (Boylorn & Orbe, 2016). Additionally, for the purposes of my study, I incorporated my self-reflexive memos and journals to demonstrate connectedness to Black women through my involvement in various sister circles as opposed to conducting a simulated sister circle via other qualitative research methods. In essence, I shared from my perspective only when referring to those experiences as to respect the anonymity of other women in these spaces. However, I used the informal conversational style attributed to sister circles for the storyteller interviews with my participants.

An Endarkened Feminist Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for my critical autoethnography qualitative study was focused on the conceptual, theoretical, and epistemological tenets from Dillard's (2012) endarkened feminism (EF). EF shares roots with Black feminist thought (BFT; Collins, 1986, 2009) and Dillard (2000; 2012) has often referenced Collins' work, noting where foundational perspectives are shared between the two theories. Thus, my study included

theoretical perspectives from Black feminist scholars like Collins' BFT (1986, 2009), namely highlighting similarities that anchor the assumptions and tenets of EF. Black feminist scholars and endarkened feminists provoke critical conversations about how Black women are researched, noting that traditional methods of research have long appeared Eurocentric methods of inquiry that often limit or eliminate Black women's cultured connectedness and mute the sovereignty of Black women's voices in research inquiry (Collins, 2009; Dillard, 2000, 2012).

Further, Dillard (2000, 2012), offered a perspective of (re)searching and (re)membering that promotes a call to action for scholars to embrace their historical, spiritual, and political ways of being into research. Dillard (2000, 2012) also addressed the duality of joy and resistance in her work of cross-cultural relationships and an aspect of *truth-telling* that is necessary to see progress toward social change. Therefore, this critical autoethnography was supported by African American woman-centric theories that celebrate intrinsic exploration of my reflexivity embedded within the research. As such, the results of my study are intended to translate into implications to inform various audiences and disciplines. As such, for my study, I conducted a careful review of frameworks that hold capacity for exploring the intersectionality of cultural identities and a critical review of diversity and inclusion efforts. In the following sections, I provide an overview of the elements within EF that are supported within my conceptual framework, which I expound on in Chapter 2.

Spirituality

EF emphasizes the perspective of Afro centrality, spirituality, truth telling, and other embodied ways of knowing and researching essential for my critical autoethnography. EF also encompasses the critical lens that critical race theorists use in counter storytelling techniques (Griffin, 2016) and tenets of BFT, which deny the notion that Black women are monolithic and therefore should not be used as participants to generalize from one study to the next (Collins, 2009).

Connectedness and Intersectionality

Another key component of the endarkened Black feminist conceptual framework includes an emphasis on intersectionality and cultural connectedness (Collins, 2009; Dillard, 2000). Intersectionality addresses the need to consider how individuals often occupy multiple social locations (Crenshaw, 1991). While both Black feminist and EF scholars acknowledge the role that collective experiences have in identity and cultural experiences, this does not deter from the mission toward rejecting narratives that suggest that Black women are monolithic. Understanding the way in which an individual's process of self-identity and self-valuation interplays with connectedness provides context for how Black women engage with each other and larger cultural spaces.

Endarkening Narrative Inquiry

The last critical aspect of using EF as this study's theoretical foundation is the integrations with aspects of narrative inquiry (and other methodological processes that center Black women) and embracing how individual experiences are essential for the integrity and emphasis on cultural inclusivity. For instance, approaches like endarkened

narrative inquiry (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021) and Black girl critical autoethnography (Boylorn, 2016) capture the nature of storytelling for Black women and propose approaches to qualitative methods that support culturally congruent research processes. Particularly, Standard 4.1 in the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs' (CACREP, 2016) counseling standards promote ethical and culturally responsive research in counselor education. In alignment with this standard, my use of EF as a culturally situated theoretical framework supports the importance of the sovereignty of Black women narrating their own stories, and as such, these principles guided my research purpose for this study (Dillard, 2012). I discuss these concepts in depth in Chapter 2.

Conclusively, the EF theoretical framework positions my research topic for exploration of cultural identity among Black women and historical context held within how knowledge is obtained and taught and will inform implications that urge culturally inclusive research practices and the evaluation of existing onto-epistemologies in research scholarship within higher education. Furthermore, the criticisms of EF should be considered within the context of this study's conceptual framework and presumptions about each theory should be examined closely against measures of goodness in alignment with my onto-epistemological orientation and methodological design, which will be described in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Definitions

Academic spaces: Often used in literature to represent either PWIs, academic spaces signify educational settings that occupy historical and systemic structures of

oppression (Jaggers, 2020). Whether within the university setting itself or the way students of color must learn to navigate these white spaces, learning that academia carries a history of white patriarchal power structures that have tremendous impacts on minoritized populations. For my study, I define academic spaces as both a physical location and the social location that is the setting of privilege, oppression, and power dynamics within education. Other variations of this term represented in my dissertation include *academia*, *academic settings*, and *academic environments*.

African American, Afro American, and Black: Primarily I use the term *Black* to self-identity as a personal choice. There are aspects that support the construct of Blackness being uplifted, while others support reclaiming African heritage (Collins, 2000). However, this does not reflect my desire to define another person's identity, as there are rationales between each of the variations supported across literature on the topic. Within my study, I use *Black* to represent myself. For research synthesis and summaries derived from supporting literature, I used the specific terms as cited by the authors, scholars, and theorists in respect to their work.

Criticality: The lens by which I explored, analyzed, and interpreted my data to extirpate oppressive and systemic structures of power and privilege within cultural context (Bhattacharya, 2017; Boylorn & Orbe, 2021). In this study, criticality and various forms of this word (e.g., critical, critically engaged) represent a style of inquiry with both pedagogical and theoretical purposes focused on understanding intersectionality, gendered racism, and oppressive stereotypes. Also, in context for my study, criticality

describes a type of discourse often used in education research related to pedagogical lens (hooks, 1989).

Endarkened feminism (EF): Developed by Dillard (2000), EF houses special meaning for terms specific to this theoretical lens, including *truth telling*, which is an aspect of (re)membering and (re)claiming cultural identity often usurped by a dominant culture's preference toward politeness that withholds honest discourse to protect white systems and structures (Dillard, 2019). Endarkened and other derivatives (e.g., endarkenment) are intentionally framed as a replacement to enlightened. Also seen in my dissertation as *endarkened feminist onto-epistemology*, *endarkened critical autoethnography*, and *endarkened feminist conceptual framework*.

Endarkened feminist conceptual framework: The conceptual framework (see Figure 1) I present in Chapter 2 uses a pictorial representation of the mosaic of influences of theory, method, and concepts that encompass the essence of my study's purpose. The colors are used alongside the colors of the *Sankofa* (see definition) bird with part of this dissertation's title: *endarkened joy*. This Sankofa symbol and title logo represent the journey this dissertation has taken me through and pay homage to my grandmother, Victoria Ford-Smith, who my siblings and I affectionately called Gay-Gay, and the joy-filled life she lived. I cannot bring forward new revelations of truth without looking back toward the way in which Gay-Gay forged many paths for me to get to where I am.

Internal gaze: Within the context of this study, the internal gaze represents the awareness and process of looking inward for reflection. My critical tales (CTs) and process of analysis will involve this internal gaze. This internal gaze also represents the

observations I made about how aspects of my identity may have been internalized from external forces.

Internalized stereotypes of identity (ISIs): ISI represents the process of internalizing beliefs and messages stemming from stereotypes. The stereotypes of identity for my study stem from known stereotypes related to race and gender that Black feminists also refer to as controlling images (Collins, 2009). These stereotypes represent perceived characteristics of Black women reinforced through various structures and internalized. Examples of ISIs that I discuss in my dissertation include SBW, ABW, and EBW.

Intersectionality: Credited to Crenshaw (1991), this represents the multiplicity of cultural identities and calls for scholars to consider how individuals can possess multiple minoritized identities to contextualize experiences of privilege, power, and oppression.

(Re)membering: Endarkened feminists use parentheses around certain prefixes to signify multiple uses of word, such as *remembering* broken down into two meanings—retrieving memory and an act of *membering* (or reconfiguring) oneself back together represented as *(re)membering*. I use Dillard's (2012) representation of this word and similar words key to EF. Other variations throughout this dissertation will look similar with prefixes separated by parenthetical punctuation: e.g., (re)search as in searching again and (un)wellness as in both wellness and unwellness.

Sankofa: Dillard (2012) described the Akan people of Ghana's Sankofa as meaning "to return and fetch what we need of strength, courage, and wisdom of these ancestors and bring it forward to address the challenges of our lives in these times" (p.

49). Sankofa carries cultural meaning and understanding that depicts a practice of retrieval (from the past) and intentional use of what is brought back that is deemed necessary to move forward. In this way, my entire critical autoethnography is a practice of Sankofa where I reach back toward generational, personal, and cultural histories to bring forth narratives and cultural understandings necessary for the purpose of influencing social change within and outside of academia.

Sista circle/sister circle: Conversational spaces where Black women gather and share their experiences and stories with one another (Collins, 2009; Griffin, 2012; Porter et al., 2020). Other variations of this term include *culturally specific counter spaces* and *affinity groups*.

Sovereignty of voice: Roots in Black feminist research and EF that reinforce the need for culturally congruent means of research methods that account for amplification of voices of minoritized individuals who are often filtered through dominant culture's theoretical lens (Bhattacharya, 2016; Collins, 2009; Dillard, 2012). Sovereignty of voice is a practice that intentionally incorporates nontraditional methods of researching and disseminating information from a place of cultural familiarity that brings forth honest conversations without reservation, restrictions, or political politeness that often tampers with and stifles anti-oppressive work (Dillard, 2012).

Spirituality: To understand my use of spirituality in this study, it is important to understand the varied contexts in which both religion and spirituality often appear interchangeably in literature. McClish (2018) provided a thorough overview of existing definitions of religion and spirituality and found that some researchers justify the need to

separate the two, using religion to represent organized institutions or entities that encompass rules, doctrines, and practices for its members (Bhattacharya & Keating, 2017; Walsh, 2009), whereas spirituality represents the freedom of individualized definition and expression of spirituality (Kirylo & Boyd, 2017). However, McClish (2018) also denoted that religion and spirituality for African American people is enmeshed for various reasons. For instance, religious practices, like prayer, can be seen and experienced as deeply personal expressions of spirituality. Within the context of my study, I find that distinct aspects from religion and spirituality are intertwined into one defined concept. However, I am also aware and intentional to differentiate between each term when necessary. In instances where the religion I ascribe to, Christianity, combats with my personal expression of spirituality, there is a need to separate the meaning of the Christian religion from my spiritual journey. Thus, where appropriate, I distinguish my use of the term spirituality as it relates to systems of oppression housed in Christianity versus instances where religious practices, like prayer, represent a part of a deeply personal and transformative spiritual expression.

Storytellers and storyteller interviews: In my study, storytellers are my participants. I use the word *participant* where appropriate related to formal processes like the institutional review board (IRB) application; however, the use of storytellers is intentional when representing the individuals, I interviewed. *Storyteller interviews* (i.e., *trusted conversations*) is the term I used to describe the semistructured interviews conducted for my study.

Trusted conversations: Also referred to as *informal conversations*, *reflexive interviews*, or *wisdom whispers*, these conversations represent a style of interviewing that is relevant to autoethnography research (Adams et al., 2015; Bhattacharya, 2017; Ellis, 2004; McClish, 2018). I have adopted the purpose of the trusted conversation and renamed this type of interview style as *storytelling interviews*, for the purposes of my study. This term best fits my conceptual framework, and I interviewed Black women I know personally.

(Un)wellness: Wellness for my study is broadly defined as wholeness of self mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Thus, unwellness would result in a fracture or disruption in either of these areas. More specifically, Shillingford et al. (2013) used Myers and Sweeney's (2005) evidence-based model of wellness to contextualize their research findings on wellness from the perspective of Black women in the CES profession. As such, they reported wellness practices of Black women in CES as containing the following: (a) spirituality, (b) self-care plan, (c) motivation to excel, (d) setting boundaries, (e) developing professional identity, and (f) developing and maintaining a positive support system. I found this specific outline of wellness practices particularly useful and relevant for describing the facets of wellness explored in my study. Further, I also used the written representation of the word *(un)wellness* to denote the duplicity of meaning, as in exploring both the unwellness and wellness related to myself as a Black woman and what was modeled to me throughout my life by other Black women. I use this term specifically within the context of exploring religion as both

a coping resource and at times a mechanism of oppression for Black women, thus interchangeably creating breeding ground for (un)wellness.

White/white and *whiteness*: An important aspect of my study is calling out white supremacy as it is represented in oppressive and systemic structures that emerge in academia. Thus, there are two variations of this term I present throughout this dissertation. At times, I represent the terms white or whiteness in lowercase to represent the social construct housed within white supremacy. I use the capitalized version of the term when it is used as a descriptor representing the cultural identity of an individual, such as the composite characters in my narratives, participants, and in research literature.

Assumptions

The assumptions of this study stemmed from my theoretical lens of EF, which explains the onto-epistemological framework guiding the decisions and interpretations of the research design. More specifically, I adopted Dillard's (2000) endarkened feminist epistemology to influence my approach to studying leadership and advocacy roles of myself as a Black woman in a CES program. Dillard (2000) explained the rationale for creating an endarkened feminist epistemology was to use "language that attempts to unmask traditionally held political and cultural constructions/constrictions ... and transforms oppressive descriptions of sociocultural phenomena and relationships" (p. 662). Dillard alluded to the prominence of dominant forms of knowledge and underrepresentation of other forms of culturally congruent forms of inquiry.

Further, Dillard (2000) shared belief that narrative forms of research have a strong connection to cultural ideology and thus must be considered when research topics focus

on cultural, social, and political aspects of individuals and societies. Dillard outlined six assumptions for guidance and for awareness of power structures in academia to increase the presence and recognition of African American women's contribution to research and scholarship. Dillard's (2000) six assumptions are as follows:

- Self-definition forms one's participation and responsibility to one's community ... rendering the researcher responsible to the members and the wellbeing of the community from which their very definition arises. (p. 672)
- Research is both an intellectual and a spiritual pursuit, a pursuit of purpose. (p. 674)
- Only within the context of community does the individual appear and through dialogue, continue to become. (p. 675)
- Concrete experiences within everyday life form the criterion of meaning-making. (p. 675)
- Knowing and research extend both historically in time and outward to the world. To approach them otherwise is to diminish their cultural and empirical meaningfulness. (p. 676)
- Power relations, manifest as racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. structure gender race and other identity relations within research. (p. 677)

Dillard (2000) theorized that:

African women's voices embodied in life notes can be seen as specialized bodies of knowledge which, while legitimate and powerful, have been excluded from the reified bodies of knowledge and epistemological roots undergirding most social

science research literature and practice. This has led to the expression, self-definition, and validation of Black female understandings and knowledge production in alternative sites, that is, in music (such as in the African-American blues traditions), poetry, literature, and daily conversations. (p. 664)

The necessity to highlight my voice for my embodied experiences as a Black woman was critical to my study as an act of resistance to the historical trauma of silencing Black voices and the eradication of the rich history of knowledge and meaning making that is ancestral, sacred, and for those like myself, detached from my educational experiences (Dillard, 2012). Rooted in my endarkened theory, I used a creative form of storytelling fused with research, which was befitting. Furthermore, my study was focused on what Dillard (2012) called *life notes*, and as such, I found the endarkened feminist epistemology the most aligned framework for my study. Dillard's (2012) assumptions are summarized within the context of her work as well as an explanation of applicability to my critical autoethnography.

Scope and Delimitations

Qualitative research is unique to other approaches to research in several ways. The values, assumptions, and methodology of qualitative research requires in-depth commitment to seeking information within context, which most often occurs within the natural setting of the phenomenon to be explored (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative researchers also carry an interesting perspective regarding their role and assume the stance of non-neutrality when factoring into the research their own positionality in the research study. For my study, this element was especially relevant to understanding the

study design and purpose. Further, it was essential to understand the adjustments I made for my study that impacted the scope and delimitations. Therefore, I considered how departures from traditional methods of inquiry as well as adjustments to critical autoethnography would impact the scope of my study. I then interrogated each decision I made for the purpose of my study with an understanding that some aspects of my study represent a modified blend of inquiry that informs my critical autoethnography.

When topics of racism, sexism, or any –ism are discussed and researched within the context of the stereotypes and myths placed on people groups, often the attention mainly focuses on overt acts, as in those acts that are visible and recognizable as oppressive acts. What is less known about the impact of stereotypes or experiences of oppression is how beliefs about the individual can be internalized. For this reason, I considered the importance of relating my experiences to the contribution for understanding the cultural connectivity between self and others, which is a crucial aspect of conducting a critical autoethnography that is ethical and relevant (Chang, 2016; Ellis et al., 2011).

Additionally, one slight variation from the common presentation of an autoethnography was that I included participants in this study to add layered accounts to my critical narratives (tales), as well as to answer my research subquestion.

Autoethnography is a standalone research method and does not require the inclusion of additional participants (Chang, 2016; Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones et al., 2016). Even so, to address my research subquestion, I found value in engaging with two participants, whom I call *storytellers*, which promoted further discourse of my topic within other settings

(within and outside) of the academic context. These storytellers met a specific criterion to qualify to participate in my study. First, the storytellers had to identify as Black women. Also, each storyteller had to know me and have played an essential role in my story to inform parts of my narrative. More specifically, to address my subquestion, these storytellers were related to my mother's side of the family to address the intergenerational context of my query. I used Ellis' (2004) *The Ethnographic I* as an informative textbook that artfully directed me on ways to write an autoethnography while including various methods of disseminating the results. Ellis (2004) provided rich examples of how to use both creative storytelling, autobiographical narratives, and ethnographic data from artifacts and interviews for the purposes of analytical and evocative storytelling.

I anticipate the results of my study are transferable to understanding unique phenomena impacting Black women in doctoral programs, especially related to the internalization of racialized and gendered stereotypes of identity. Even so, I do not propose that my results are generalizable to all Black women CES doctoral students; to do so would be incongruent with my endarkened onto-epistemology. I, instead, inferred the conditions necessary for advocacy and cultural awareness that is useful to impact social change for students who identify with the internalized struggle of multiple-oppressed identities.

Limitations

An important part of research design and a necessary step to consider are the limitations of a study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). One limitation of my study was the use of

memory as a data source. One specific way that I offset this limitation was expanding my data collection beyond one source of data (i.e., personal accounts) to include multiple data sources like artifacts (i.e., reflexive research memos) and storytelling interviews with participants, which added layered accounts to the CTs (Bhattacharya, 2016; Chang, 2016; Ellis, 2004; Ellis et al., 2011).

Another limitation of this study pertained to the common pitfalls of autoethnographic research, including excessive focus on self without connecting to others' stories. One way I mitigated this issue was by providing a detailed description of my study's purpose, questions, and target population, leaving little room for misinterpretation. Another way I addressed this pitfall was my inclusion of storyteller interviews (Adams et al., 2015). I completed two semistructured storyteller interviews with participants in addition to crafting my personal narratives (or personal recollections) and gathering archival data to address this criticism (Bhattacharya, 2016; Chang, 2016; Ellis, 2004; Ellis et al., 2011). Additionally, reflexivity is ingrained in the foundation of autoethnographic work and centers the "visibility of self in research" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 71). I engaged in reflexive journaling throughout the research study process as well as regular discussions about reflexivity with my dissertation committee for accountability for remaining aligned with my conceptual framework.

Another pitfall discussed by autoethnographers is the ethical concerns related to involving the representation of other individuals throughout the self-narratives (Boylorn & Orbe, 2016; Chang, 2016; Ellis, 2004). I addressed this concern by shielding identities in certain aspects of my story through the creation of fictional settings like a Zoom

meeting that represented multiple interactions with different people. By mitigating the pitfall of ethics, I created a separate limitation of my study that impacted how I portrayed the scenes and settings of the tales to ensure no particular person could be easily identifiable. I expounded on my rationale for the decisions I made for this critical autoethnography in Chapter 3.

Other potential barriers were related to the consideration that having a specific target population may also create difficulty in obtaining the desired number of participants for a study. However, because my research design heavily relied on multiple sources of data, with my contribution to the data being the primary source, this limitation was small relative to the scope of the purpose and design of this study. Furthermore, I considered limitations related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ability to collect data from additional participants and determined these were minimal as well. Due to the autographic nature of this study, the number of participants needed was small, which reduced the necessity of recruiting numerous participants for my study. Additionally, to account for specific accommodations related to COVID-19, I conducted the storytelling interviews via a videoconferencing platform.

Significance

Many researchers suggest factors that contribute to stress for Black women graduate students; however, few researchers have explored the experiences of Black women, as told by Black women, as these experiences relate to internalizing racial and gendered stereotypes as they navigate doctoral study. Therefore, specifically exploring cultural intersections and academic identity was necessary and significant to contributing

to research that explores how to support Black women and their mental health while they are enrolled in doctoral programs (Bernard et al., 2018; Grant & Ghee, 2015).

Furthermore, researchers in this area must seek to uncover the stories and experiences of Black women in nonconventional ways that elicit raw data free from constriction and placating, which is often learned behavior ingrained in Black students who want to excel. Understanding the sensitive nature of this type of study, I used ethnographic methods to gather information, including CTs, to contribute to rich data sources addressing this problem.

Through this study, I shifted from monolithic perceptions of Black women and instead emphasized the unique differences in experiences while illuminating shared aspects of these experiences, which are presented in the existing literature, to provoke a movement toward social change. The results of this study may provide insight into the internalized experiences to raise awareness of what challenges Black women may be experiencing related to (un)wellness outside of academia that they are not disclosing for fear of the risk to their professional advancement.

Additionally, the results of this study may be used to inform culturally responsive best practices for working with Black women in doctoral counseling programs in ways that support wellness and reject messages that would harm these students' physical, mental, and spiritual well-being as a form of investment and protection for these future counselor educators. Furthermore, through this study's design, I also aimed to inform future pathways toward research that allows for culturally specific traditions and practices to be recognized as valid research and uphold culturally congruent research

practices outside the Eurocentric methodologies that are otherwise lacking in the area of cultural inclusivity.

Exploring strength-based and culturally responsive approaches to counseling practice, theory, and research could promote healthy and safe spaces for growth for Black women and encourage those outside this cultural position to engage in an anti-oppressive model for those who will engage with Black women in academia. Lastly, the findings of this research could contribute to a rich submersion into a greater understanding of the role of challenges and internalized oppression in developing professional identity (e.g., academic presence) that could encourage a culturally sensitive and wellness approach to supporting Black women. Burkhard (2020) wrote,

For those of us, whose lives and livelihoods, expectations of the future, fears, and hopes for our children, ourselves, and those we care about are so deeply bound up with the very phenomena that we study, autoethnographic writing remains a lifeline in the interrogation the structures that shape our experiences. (p. 131)

Burkhard (2020) described the nuances of autoethnographic from Black feminist perspectives and (re)claiming spaces that previously may have been devoid of diverse methodologies rooted in cultural understandings, knowledge, and epistemologies. McClish-Boyd and Bhattacharya (2021) further proclaimed that endarkening research praxis to be inclusive of cultural ways of knowing, including endarkened narrative inquiry, must be advocated for to promote cultural inclusivity within academia. My research topic involves amplifying my sovereignty of voice and increasing the insider knowledge that can be gleaned from the experiences of multiminoritized populations like

Black women. As this quote above states, I am deeply entwined with that which I am researching, and I was motivated to provide a raw, accurate depiction of my experiences for the purpose of learning and growth for a greater purpose.

My critical autoethnography fused narrative inquiry and autoethnography methods through a critical lens and incorporated these variations to explore the interconnectedness of Black womanhood and social justice advocacy as told by me in addition to layered accounts from perspectives of Black women in my family. I plan to use my results to impact cultural responsiveness that may shape how counselors approach therapy, how counselor educators guide counseling students, and how research and advocacy can be seen as conjunctive with social change for CES professionals. Furthermore, I contributed to the deeper exploration of Black womanhood, as told by a Black woman, to illuminate the experiences of internalized stereotypes, advocacy, (un)wellness, and intersectionality as it applies to academia, which produced results that can be transferable to other disciplines and fields of study within higher education.

The Chapter Sankofa

I end this chapter, and each chapter hereafter, with a summary through the lens of Sankofa as in my intentional retrieval of the most salient embedded parts necessary to move forward in engaging with this dissertation. In this chapter, I introduced my research purpose, questions, and the nature of my study. I included insights related to considerations that informed my decisions for this critical autoethnography. I emphasized the main aspects of my study (e.g., research purpose, autoethnography, and endarkened

narrative inquiry) that support my research design and are undergirded by my conceptual framework.

I provided a brief overview of critical autoethnography and my endarkened feminist onto-epistemology, including the assumptions and delimitations I considered with my overall study design. I defined key terms relevant to this study like criticality, Sankofa, and trusted conversations. I described my study's design, including my use of multiple data sources like personal (re)collection of events, artifacts, and trusted conversations within the context of autoethnographic CTs. Lastly, I provided an overview of the study's limitations and significance.

I have followed the traditional structure of dissertation format with five chapters that include the necessary elements of an introduction, literature review, methods, results, and discussion. However, I have incorporated theoretical language from Dillard's components of (re)membering in the chapter titles. Dillard (2021) outlined five components of (re)membering: (re)searching, (re)visioning, (re)cognition, (re)claiming, and (re)presenting. Except for (re)claiming which I replace with (re)engaging in Chapter 5, I incorporated each of the components in a way of reminding the reader (and myself) of the methodological and theoretical importance of (re)membering.

In Chapter 2, I provide an in-depth review of literature related to previous research, similar studies, and elaborate on my conceptual framework that undergirds my entire study. More specifically, I expound on the interconnectedness between my core concepts of internalized stereotypes of identity, wellness, and academic presence within

an EF theoretical and epistemological lens. Lastly, I explore existing research related to my study and provide an overview of my literature search strategy.

Chapter 2: (Re)Visioning the Literature Review

There are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt. — Audre Lorde

Introduction

The problem addressed in this qualitative research study are the ISIs related to intersections of race and gender that are held by Black women (such as the SBW identity), and how ISIs impact Black women's experiences with academic presence and (un)wellness while pursuing doctoral degrees at PWIs. Additionally, I explored the impact that ISIs have on influencing the representation of Black women's role in social justice as recognized through the lens of leadership and advocacy roles within the CES professional identity. The purpose of this critical autoethnography was to explore how I, as a Black woman, have navigated merging fragmented parts of myself to inform my professional identity as a counselor educator through negotiations of culturally situated experiences of race, gender, intersectionality, creativity, and spirituality while completing my doctoral degree.

Many researchers have illuminated the intersection of race and gender and the difficulties women of color face as double minorities (Spates et al., 2020; Watson & Hunter, 2015; Watson-Singleton, 2017). More specifically, Black women in graduate programs encounter microaggressions based on gender and racial stereotypes that interfere with their overall psychological and physiological wellness (Jacobs & Davis, 2017; Jerald et al., 2017; Porter et al., 2020; Spates et al., 2020). Thomas et al. (2004) researched the stereotypical tropes held by society and Black women that impact health

and wellness, including the SBW identity. Others have linked the ABW and SBW stereotypes with mistreatment, misdiagnosis, and negligence of caring for Black women in health care and mental health practices (Nelson et al., 2016; Watson-Singleton, 2017; Watson-Singleton et al., 2021; Watson & Hunter, 2016). For instance, health practitioners may believe Black women have a higher pain tolerance and subsequently adjust their level of care based on this belief rather than based on what the Black woman is reporting.

Additionally, Black women may internalize these same stereotypes and may then suffer from various health disparities based on their internalized perception of strength (Erving, 2018; Henderson et al., 2013; Jerald et al., 2017). Understanding how stereotypes impact Black women's identities and experiences is crucial to linking to causal effects on overall health and wellness. Further, researchers have explored how these same experiences appear in other systems, like education. Acosta (2019) discussed the rigor of doctoral studies and desire to achieve academic presence, which can be impacted by perceptions of strength held by Black women and others. Further, other researchers focused on the ways gendered racism exists within academia, thus impacting Black women's experiences that uphold systemic oppression, specifically as these women pursue higher degrees (Porter et al., 2020; Shavers & Moore, 2019).

In this chapter, I will introduce the conceptual framework I developed to describe the relationship between the methodological, theoretical, and key concepts presented in this study. I will provide a thorough review of research to outline the major constructs pivotal to this study's design that include ISIs, academic presence, and wellness. Further, using an endarkened Black feminist framework, I will address how the concepts of my

study interact with one another, and I expound on how intersecting cultural identities of Black women and their experiences in academic settings impact wellness. Additionally, I will use Chapter 2 as an empirical, conceptual, and theoretical process of discovery, herein referred to as *Sankofa*, to delve into the existing literature (past), to reflect on what I found (present), and to bring back the parts of the findings that inform my critical autoethnography (future).

Literature Search Strategy

In this review of the literature, I searched for both conceptual and empirical articles that addressed each of my study's core constructs, as well as how these constructs intersect with one another. The use of academic resources, like databases, to find existing literature is a cornerstone of successful research (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). The databases I used for my literature review were ERIC, EBSCOhost, PsychINFO, Sage, Google Scholar, and ProQuest.

I used Google Scholar to find articles found in sources of other articles that were relevant to my study. Google Scholar's "cited by" function was useful to me for a citation chaining strategy that allowed me to narrow down the inclusion of seminal and older works pertinent to my research study. I used the constructs of my study as keyword search terms and included *professional identity, internalized oppression, gendered racism, stereotypes, strong Black woman, angry Black woman, educated Black woman, endarkened feminism, Black feminist thought, Black women, wellness, well-being, academic presence, higher education, counselor education and supervision, graduate studies, and doctoral students*. Additional terms related to research design included

autoethnography, *critical autoethnography*, and *narrative inquiry*. I also used Boolean search term strategies to find articles that discussed two or more of my study's constructs, which was vital in understanding the interconnectedness between key concepts, theoretical foundation, and the overall conceptual framework that I developed.

Additionally, I used specific search parameters to locate peer-reviewed articles published within the past 5 years in addition to several seminal works used to identify key literature. More specifically, I refined my search to find articles related to the topic and that used a similar research design. This presented a challenge within the context of research databases specific to counseling and counselor education. To mitigate this, I used several articles from peer-reviewed journals in related disciplines, including sociology, psychology, higher education research, and culturally specific journals

Several key search terms specific to my study (e.g., *strong Black woman* and *endarkened feminism*) yielded results of fewer than 10, and in some cases, specific combinations of terms produced no results. I found even fewer results when considering the combination of terms published within the last 5 years. Therefore, I used Google Scholar to search for citations of seminal works found in recent articles. For articles found within PsychINFO and Thoreau, I used the references of these articles to find additional articles.

I encountered several issues regarding representation in counseling journals related to Black women during the search process. I found several dissertations focused on elements of my study. However, despite recommendations continue to suggest research focused on Black women and its application to counselor education and the

counseling profession, published literature does not adequately include these recommendations. This indicated a limited number of published articles in counseling journals regarding Black women, stereotypes, wellness, and academia. This is my rationale for including many articles from journals outside of CES.

Overall, the search strategies I used for this literature review were heavily influenced by the entire premise of the Sankofa practice—a retrieval of (past) research to bring back to (present) study to influence (future) social change. In the next section, I will discuss my conceptual framework. I will provide an in-depth retrieval of existing knowledge from the EF scholars that supports the major concepts of my study and the interconnectedness of these topics with empirical and conceptual literature that inform my study.

An Endarkened Feminist Conceptual Framework

Endarkened feminism (EF), developed by Cynthia Dillard, describes the importance of understanding the fragmentation of identity of Black women (Dillard, 2012). EF has similar roots as BFT and thus creates a rationale for empowering Black women's voices or the sovereignty of their voices. The concept of sovereignty of voice emphasizes the need for nontraditional methods of research that challenges the prevalence of white-centered methods that exclude other cultural ways of knowing and research, which is especially pervasive in higher education spaces (K. Bhattacharya, personal communication, January 22, 2021). EF has tenets that also focus on the sovereignty of voice, in addition to acknowledging the cultural positioning of Black

women who have yet to connect with their African heritage while also experiencing the harsh realities of what it means to be a Black woman in America (Dillard, 2012).

Spirituality as a way of knowing is described in Dillard's work related to EF, connecting the spiritual, embodied experiences with research and teaching approaches.

Dillard (2012) stated,

From an endarkened feminist framework, exploring the power of spiritual identity and spirituality is a way to engage an interconnectedness with those with whom we work, teach and research ... to see the work of defining and developing consciousness of Black womanhood through cultural memories. (p. 13)

EF provided a way to integrate my spiritual identity into the framework of how I perceive myself and the world around me and, ultimately, how I approach situations related to my personal and professional identity. The role of spirituality also is prominent in my experiences that I analyzed throughout this critical autoethnography. In the next section, I will describe the major tenets of EF and existing literature that used each of these theories for research inquiry.

Endarkened Feminism

EF provides a theoretical lens for studying Black women that encourages the telling of Black women's stories through recognition of memory and embodied lived experiences. Furthermore, EF's major tenets address spirituality as integral to the understanding of Black women, historical dispossession of cultural identity, and the intentional practice of recognition toward wellness for Black women. EF recognizes the value in Black women's lived experiences and positions its tenets or lessons around the

understanding that these experiences are sacred and therefore must be preserved (Dillard, 2012).

My choice to use EF as my theoretical framework was fueled by this theory's capacity to illustrate a process of supporting Black women. Dillard (2012) deemed (re)membering as not only the act of retrieving memories but reassembling parts of self in identity disconnected from African ancestry, and reconfiguration is deeply connected with sense of wholeness and well-being for Black women. Moreover, EF was particularly relevant to my study because of the theory's acknowledgement of intersections of oppression, identity, and cultural understandings essential and congruent with my study's purpose. Further, Dillard (2012) provided a launching point of exploration for my study specifically related to the importance of including aspects of culture and spirituality when conducting research involving Black women. Dillard described three key lessons from EF that influence the research design of my dissertation: (a) (re)membering cultural identity, (b) connective and collective experiences, and (c) recognition of (re)claimed identity.

(Re)membering Cultural Identity

(Re)membering cultural identity within EF relates to the detachment from diaspora and African culture. Dillard (2000, 2012, 2019, 2020) speaks often of the use of memory in reconstructing the identity of Black women, specifically, African American women who have learned to conceal aspects of their African heritage, only to reveal in environments where their culture is celebrated. Concealing identity is a type of trauma reaction that occurs to diminish *otherness* and blend in or assimilate to dominant cultures. In some Black families, the desire to assimilate and *act White* are highly valued as

leading to more opportunities. In other ways, Dillard (2019) acknowledged the distance that African Americans have from their own African heritage, that results in a disembodiment of experiences that are more difficult to recall. This provides the rationale for the promotion of reconciliation to African culture in EF.

The lasting impact of erasing cultural aspects of identity often push Black women to adopt or adapt to dominant cultural roles, more specifically, stereotypical roles of Black women (Dillard, 2000). These roles, which I will describe later in this chapter, promote a type of superhuman strength that while appearing flattering on the surface, has been used to continue to oppress Black women within society. These stereotypical tropes become weaponized against Black women, and Black women's bodies as justifications for mistreatment. When internalized, these tropes became staggeringly harmful for Black women who adopt these identities to perform a type of Blackness that is acceptable to the detriment of themselves. Dillard (2000) illustrated several ways in which to engage with (re)membering, but most sacredly discussed the powerful tool of memory to help reconstruct identity. This is a key feature of this theoretical framework that supports the scholarship of storytelling in research as a sacred and culturally situated practice.

(Re)membering Connectedness and Collective Experiences

Black women use their connected and individual experiences to (re)member their identities (Collins, 2009; Dillard, 2000). These collective experiences help Black women relate to their own experiences and enhance meaning-making of how their experiences might be shared among those within their cultural community. The reason for needing to reconfigure memory through the telling of narratives and sharing stories is due to the

longstanding issue within American history that has withheld, altered, and diminished the cultural history of Black people who were enslaved in America. Dillard (2000) discussed the lack of acknowledgment of the historical traumatic past of African Americans and described how failing to acknowledge this past inevitably dismisses the existence of its lasting impact on Black people (and Black children) in current times. This negligence has led to continuing patterns that are not welcoming environments of learning for Black children in the U.S. educational systems.

My understanding the way of knowing and intertwining with the understanding of the role of spirituality within cultural identity is critical for this autoethnography. EF addresses aspects of spirituality and describes cultural elements of African ancestry through what is called embodied experiences. It is through these embodied experiences that are rooted in cultural, historical, and spiritual contexts, that EF invites Black women to explore all cultural aspects of their identity (Dillard, 2012). Dillard's (2012) EF calls for "radical openness" that allows for cultural ways of knowing, especially related to amplifying embodiment of spirituality that is often silenced and dismissed in research (p. 81). Instead, Dillard (2012) encourages endarkened Black feminists to embrace the spiritual nature of knowing and interweave these experiences into exploration of cultural memories.

Recognition of (Re)Claimed Identity

EF emboldens a way of recognizing the ways in which Black women interact with others within and outside certain cultural locations, in ways that can be enriching and empowering for all involved and without being one-sided. For my study, Dillard's (2000,

2019, 2020) work informs the desire for this dissertation to lead to meaningful conversations among fellow scholars and colleagues that will evolve beyond mere spectatorship when seeking to understand Black women. EF is a welcoming-to type of conversation about the intersections of gendered racial experiences in the hopes of reaching toward a goal that supports growth through engagement.

Within the EF framework, Dillard (2020) highlights the impact of using storytelling (writing as inquiry) as scholarship as contribution to culturally relevant strategies which is a CACREP (2016) standard regarding research and practice worth acknowledging. Dillard (2020) illustrated a contrast between how educators in the United States prepare to engage with Black children as compared to how Black children are liberated in their expression and learning in Ghana (Dillard, 2000). When Dillard (2000) described the value attributed to the cultural context in Ghana compared to how educators engage with Black children in America, she then presented strategies to be learned from the educators in Ghana that should be replicated in education within the United States. More specifically, she presented her strategy through a metaphor that outlined two steps that likened educating Black children to preparation for a guest or visitor: (a) Gathering the best resources in preparation for arrival and (b) Excitement for the encounter. Both considerations are not inconceivable when considering preparing for an invited guest. However, Dillard (2000) critiques areas of U.S. history that tend to fall short in this preparation process.

Endarkened Feminism in Research Literature

Bostic and Manning (2015) reviewed Dillard's earlier contributions to research disciplines related to Black feminism, the incorporation of spirituality with cultural and indigenous feminisms, and theoretical and epistemological literature that explores ways to bring humanity into research. This article highlights major themes presented within EF frameworks and presented insight for how researchers can expand to include cultural and indigenous ways of knowing and learning. Bostic and Manning (2015) shared how the use of EF can demystify cultural approaches to research, like the use of personal narratives, and move research literature towards inclusivity of diverse onto-epistemological methods of inquiry.

Dillard et al. (2000) shared three narratives from African American female professors at a large Midwestern university to answer questions related to: (a) the meaning of spirituality for African American women; (b) understanding how enactment and embodiment of a spiritual paradigm impact learning of students and teacher; and (c) discovering implications for theory and praxis. Dillard et al. (2000) discussed how spirituality is expressed in various forms within the African American community and thus, in their paper, they chose to represent the narratives in non-traditional ways, using poetry, story, song, and dialogue as main displays of data. Dillard et al. (2000) used various forms of data collection like document analysis, sister circle groups, and a group of informants from diverse backgrounds who had taken a course with or participated in a project with Dillard. Although Dillard et al. (2000) noted that not all forms of data collected were specifically used in the final paper, the use of triangulation of data is an

approach that suits ethnographic forms of inquiry (Chang, 2016; Ellis et al., 2011; Holman Jones et al. 2016), and is also aligned within EF frameworks (Dillard, 2000).

Jacobs and Davis (2017) used a focus group for their research and found that communal spaces for Black women fostered a sense of connectivity, belonging, and safety among Black women. Jacobs and Davis explored the EF tenet of (re)membering connectedness, highlighting the importance of recalling and (re)membering experiences with gendered racism and other forms of oppression. Another element consistent with these affinity spaces is the group content which often intentionally addresses issues related to race, microaggressions, racial trauma, and gender. Additionally, researchers have studied the importance of connectedness with culture as well as with professional identity for graduate students of color (Griffin, 2016). Particularly, when exploring the nature in which Black women seek mentorship, affinity spaces, and culturally specific support throughout their academic trajectories (Brunsma et al., 2017; Grant & Ghee, 2015; Johnson, 2020).

Johnson (2020) included EF as a framework for epistemology and methodological design in what she described as the humanization of research which is “necessary in the pursuit of social justice” (p. 638). Johnson (2020) used a five year-long ethnographic study in her role as professor in residence and her interactions with three students from grades 9-12. Johnson’s (2020) study illuminated personal experiences with teaching, researching, and social identity as a Black, queer woman. Further, Johnson’s (2020) study discussed individual and communal change and particularly highlighted the role of theory in promoting critically engaged inquiry and social justice.

Additionally, Johnson (2020) noted EF as being central to the humanization of the individuals and communities that she researched, crediting EF for its emphasis on responsibility to reject spectatorship of phenomena and instead become devoted to making contributions to the fields of study, including commitment to personal growth in the process. Subsequently, Johnson (2020) found that her positionality was central to her ethnographic work and essential to her interactions with students throughout the course of teaching them and researching her teaching pedagogy that required emotional awareness, connection, and self-awareness. Johnson's (2020) perspective of the humanization of research and use of EF is especially critical for my study. I will expound on the role of ethics, the role of researcher, and other important considerations for this critical autoethnography in Chapter 3.

Endarkened Feminism and Significance for This Study

EF provides a lens by which to interpret the literature on my research topic. Specifically, using the key components of EF like (re)membering cultural identity, (re)membering connectedness and (re)claiming identity, I analyzed literature which reported about Black women, their cultural identity, and connectedness with others. Stemming from tenets derived from BFT, EF expounds on the cultural aspects of understanding, particularly related to Black women's identity and the significance of spirituality.

Spirituality is integral to Dillard's (2012) work with EF and thus must be mentioned when discussing identity. Dillard (2020) described Sankofa, which is the spiritual practice of using memory to retrieve what is needed from ancestral and cultural

knowledge and then bringing that information forward to future endeavors. Furthermore, Sankofa is revered as a cultural practice specific to African ancestry, like Ghana. This concept compliments BFT's emphasis on the importance of Black women's culture in how we understand and analyze experiences shared in research (Collins, 2009). My critical autoethnography must recognize the role of the spiritual part of my identity in order to critically analyze the data in a way that is ethically and culturally congruent to my research purpose.

Dillard (2019) has illustrated different ways in which joy can be felt among colleagues who want to engage with Black women through friendship and scholarship. More specifically, calling out the need for balance regarding genuine friendship that does not solely rely on the type of research curiosity that can be invasive without genuine, ethical, and integral intent. Dillard (2019) argued the necessity of examining how friendship can be positioned as a mutual effort that emphasizes "visibility, mutuality, and shared partnership" (p. 113). She referenced Alice Walker's thoughts on joy being intertwined with resistance, likening the difficult conversations that Black women have with White women, that if both persist, can lead to meaningful friendships (Dillard, 2019).

My study has adopted these sentiments of true joy, and the belief that joy can co-labor with resistance, vulnerability, and social justice. I understand that even the difficult narratives that I shared can lead to clarity, social change, and fulfilling introspection for those who engage with this dissertation. Additionally, Dillard (2000, 2012) emphasized the connected nature between the culture, community, and spirituality, which are

components of my research purpose and research questions. These cultural understandings inform my conceptual framework, which guides my research design.

Looking Through an Endarkened Lens

This critical autoethnography used both theoretical and epistemological perspectives that center Black women and how individual experiences can create further understanding of cultural phenomena within a larger context. More specifically, I have used foundational tenets from Black feminist theories, in particular EF, that is essential for the integrity and emphasis on cultural inclusivity within research. Particularly, in alignment with the 2016 CACREP Standards (4.1), which promotes ethical and culturally responsive research in counselor education, my study was supported by tenets from EF. Additionally, certain aspects from narrative theories, including the use of archetypes and how they are integrated to help inform the research design, which I introduce briefly in this chapter and will expound on in Chapter 3 relative to the aspects of design that these additional perspectives influenced.

I developed a conceptual framework that describes the relationship between theory, methodology, literature, and the research topic (and subtopics), and their alignment with the research questions and purpose. More specifically, this culturally situated conceptual framework emphasizes the use of research designs that Dillard (2000) described as “culturally indigenous ways of knowing research and enacting leadership in the academy” (p. 661), which are useful for studies that wish to increase the cultural awareness of self and others (Boylorn & Orbe, 2021; Chang, 2016; Kim, 2015). Within the counselor education context for social change, this form of inquiry can enhance

understanding for cultural humility and cultural responsiveness and produce implications that explore how these narratives and additional forms of analysis (i.e., lyrical analysis, verse analysis) contribute to larger cultural contexts (Boylorn & Orbe, 2016; Chang, 2016; Ellis, 2004).

Figure 1

An Endarkened Feminist Conceptual and Methodological Framework



Figure 1 is pictorial representation of the theoretical, substantive, and methodological aspects of my study. The elements represented in olive green, golden yellow, and blood red are described in this chapter, whereas elements represented in peach will be described further in Chapter 3. The different elements of my conceptual framework are color coded. The theoretical frameworks methodological tenets are represented in golden yellow. The two main concepts framing my study are represented in olive green with the subtopics critical to this study represented in blood red. The methodological aspects for this study are represented in peachy pink. Lastly, my study design, autoethnography, is centered in

the framework with the Sankofa bird symbol next to it. In the remaining parts of this section, I describe how each component of the conceptual framework interacts with one another.

Narrative Inquiry and Writing to (Re)Member

I used narratives as a method of (re)membering aspects of my life related to my development as an educator, with specific emphasis on experiences I have had during my doctoral program in CES. Writing to remember my past and to reconfigure my identity is a major aspect of my critical autoethnography that is aligned with my conceptual framework (Dillard, 2012). Writing is a method of inquiry and analysis is used within critical autoethnography literature, including the use of personal narratives as the primary data source of inquiry to answer the research questions (Adams et al., 2015; Boylorn & Orbe, 2021; Ellis, 2004; Ellis et al., 2011; Holman Jones et al., 2016).

In my study, I offered parts of my story as an action of vulnerability and an action of resistance to contribute to this conversation. Thinking back to Dillard's (2019) discussion on joy and resistance coexisting, I too, welcome the readers to (re)member their identity and to explore how conversations about race, when endured collectively through research inquiry and advocacy, can bear the fruit of joy. Furthermore, the spiritual practice of Sankofa strengthens the intentionality with using memory to construct autoethnography, towards a greater understanding of cultural identity. In the next section, I briefly introduce autoethnography and critical autoethnography, however, in Chapter 3 I will expound on my specific research design and explain the iterative process leading to decisions that were influenced by my conceptual framework.

Endarkening Narrative Design

McClish-Boyd and Bhattacharya (2021) pointed out that although narrative inquiry scholars have promoted the study of Black women's storied experiences, the existence (and support) of developing Black women-centric methodological frameworks is sparse. The connection between Black feminist scholars and EF scholars and the major concepts of this study are important to understand as conducting research using autoethnography in and of itself tends to raise questions regarding purpose and intent. McClish-Boyd and Bhattacharya (2021) proposed an endarkened narrative inquiry (ENI) design that included the use of literary texts, music, lyrics, and other forms of artistic expression from Black women and women of color by which to create themes related to storytelling of one's own experiences. The authors described a process of reading and rereading novels to examine "Black women's way of being, knowing, and living" (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021, p. 539). For my research, I incorporated ENI design into my data collection and data analysis and informing my decisions throughout my study (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021).

I selected a type of arts-based writing style, namely literary storytelling (also called literary-based narrative inquiry), where I wrote creative nonfiction using composite (fictional) characters, semistructured trusted conversation interviews, artifacts, and my personal (re)collections to present my CTs as research data (Kim, 2015). Further, I used composite characters to create and merge fragments of different people into one character for the purposes of my CTs. Aspects of the setting accounted for ethical considerations that I will discuss in Chapter 3 and represented a combination of real and

imagined settings with careful consideration of anonymity of individuals who I may be unfavorably inferred in my narratives. This type of structure is common with autoethnographic researchers as they understand the sensitivity to writing autoethnography may involve others who are intertwined with researcher's story.

Critical Autoethnography

Critical autoethnography is represented in the center of my conceptual framework by which the other elements are wrapped around it. Visually this represents how each of the components of this critical autoethnography informed the research design and organically influenced and stemmed from this method. Ashlee et al. (2017) and Reed-Danahay (2017) justified the need for critical autoethnography, particularly for exploring topics related to minoritized populations. More specifically, when considering the intersectionality of multiple minoritized identities in my study (i.e., both as Black and as a woman), critical autoethnography within an endarkened framework was most fitting.

Reed-Danahay (2017) credited the distinction between autoethnography and critical autoethnography to Pierre Bourdieu and explained the difference as a more in-depth view of the reflexive process of personal accounts of “institutional and professional contexts” that are explored in the authors' lives (p. 152). Similarly, Holman Jones (2016) defined the appropriate use of *criticality* in critical autoethnography, describing the fluid nature of research – as an ongoing process of inquiry – that can promote strong connections between scientific theorizing and powerful storytelling. Further, Holman Jones (2016) recognized what Della Pollock described as “living bodies of thought” and elaborated on how to build bridges between the artistic work of autoethnography and the

analysis of the work to promote critical social change (p. 229). One way to bridge this gap is the use of the citational approach, in which critical autoethnographers incorporate references throughout the writing. This can be done throughout the written work, in separate section of analysis, or in the endnotes (Bhattacharya, 2017; Holman Jones, 2016).

Ashlee et al. (2017) explored intersectional racism and sexism in higher education using a critical collaborative autoethnography, in which all three authors identify as women of color who hold both individual and collective experiences that relate to their topic of inquiry. Ashlee et al. used individual autoethnographies to understand a phenomenon in a larger cultural context that lends itself to *wokeness*. They described wokeness as “critical consciousness to intersecting systems of oppression” (Ashlee et al., 2017, p. 90). The use of critical autoethnography was emphasized by the researchers as an act of resistance and empowerment that held value individually and collectively. Particularly interesting for consideration in my study was that the three authors particularly used this qualitative method to place their personal accounts of experiences within the context of wellness and oppression while in graduate studies. Additionally, Ashlee et al. (2017) selected this methodology to create counterstories that can challenge the systemic oppressions that exist and persist within higher education settings. Highlighting experiences of internalization is a unique feature of this method of inquiry, allowing each author to describe their experiences within the context of external and internal forces of oppression while promoting the utility and necessity of embracing

methods of inquiry that challenge historical and systemic roots of oppression (Ashlee et al., 2017).

Boylorn and Orbe (2021) defined critical autoethnography as a “strategic approach that critiques and challenges cultural and hegemonic standards...” (p. 6). Critical autoethnography fuses critical analysis with storytelling specifically when accounting for the intersectionality of experiences from both privileged and oppressed standpoints (Boylorn & Orbe, 2021). Bhattacharya (2017) described a specific aspect of critical autoethnography as involving personal accounts of experiences within power dynamics and experiences of oppression and inequity. More specifically, Black feminist and EF scholars in social science research have used critical autoethnography to illuminate issues related to intersectionality, oppressive stigmas (internalized or externalized), and in efforts to dismantle systemic and institutionalized methods of gendered racism (Boylorn & Orbe, 2021; Durham, 2021).

My critical autoethnography challenged hegemonic ways of knowing and learning throughout the entire research design and study. I used my conceptual framework as a guide as it contains theoretical, substantive, and methodological frameworks. Theoretically, Black feminist research and specifically the tenets from EF that center the significance of using scholarship to amplify sovereignty of Black women’s voices (Collins, 1986; 2009; Dillard, 2000, 2019). Substantively, this study is entrenched with elements from EF and other Afrocentric theorists, that incorporate spirituality, contemplative practices, and creativity to inform design. This critical autoethnography is inspired by notions of resistance and joy as spiritual experiences that can be repurposed

towards social change in research (Dillard, 2000, 2019). Lastly, methodologically, narrative inquiry, with emphasis on writing as a form of inquiry and a form of analysis, serves as the foundation for this autoethnography (Bhattacharya, 2017; Kim, 2015).

Interconnectedness Between Core Concepts

The core constructs of this study include academic presence, internalized stereotypes, and wellness. Each construct alone has an expanse of research in multiple disciplines, however, for the purposes of this study, it was the ways in which these constructs overlapped that informed the research questions and purposes of this study. In the remaining sections within this chapter, I present an in-depth overview of these major constructs that reflects an extensive review of literature. The connections between theoretical and conceptual elements shown in the conceptual framework are very much integrated and linked with the research purpose and design of this critical autoethnography. I will explain the use of autoethnography as method and the use writing as inquiry and analysis more specifically in Chapter 3.

The concepts I addressed in this study included the intersections of cultural identities, particularly understanding ISI of Black women (i.e., SBW), Black culture, spirituality, individuality, and the culture of academic pursuits, namely higher education, and doctoral studies. Each concept is experienced alone *and* together – which is a large factor guiding the conceptual framework of this study. For instance, the SBW identity may be described alone throughout this chapter, but additionally, I included them in the sections on wellness and academic presence. The ISIs for Black women are often co-opted in ways that are meant to uphold oppressive structures, like directly within

academic settings (Porter et al., 2020). Additionally, specific stereotypes like the SBW identity have a unique impact on Black women's wellness when experienced within in academic spaces, which added another layer of focus for this study.

The ways in which I explored each concept in my critical autoethnography stemmed from the interconnectedness displayed within this study's conceptual framework. For instance, EF's tenets support the emphasis on wellness (e.g., spiritual, physical, mental) while acknowledging the influence of cultural identity and the intersecting identities therein. The research highlighted in this chapter focuses on both shared experiences and individual accounts from Black women to provide a more in-depth look at the complexity of privilege and oppression held within academic settings as seen through the EF lens. Additionally, I presented research from Black feminist scholars who have contributed to my Endarkened Black Feminist conceptual framework. Lastly, I synthesized and critiqued the research on the ISI and experiences of (un)wellness for Black women within the setting of academia. Further, building from existing literature on internalization and oppression to provide an in-depth overview of how my critical autoethnography will address these studies' limitations.

The sovereignty of voice as an expression of the individuality of the Black woman is demonstrated throughout Black feminist literature as a part of anti-oppressive and inclusive models of research (Bhattacharya, 2016; Collins, 2009; Dillard, 2012). My critical autoethnography will center my experiences relating to cultural identities, intersections of cultural identities, academic presence, and wellness. Further, my conceptual framework serves as the backbone to this study and provides an overview of

interconnectedness between concepts studied, cultural positionality, and theories that empower and advocate to amplify voices (including mine) that are too often diminished or excluded in research.

My conceptual framework takes a critical stance on methodological and onto-epistemological designs regarding how research is approached, collected, and analyzed (which I will describe in Chapter 3), and challenges notions that persist within academia and scholarship that suggest that cultural forms of being and knowing, like spirituality are not essential for understanding, which is particularly detrimental towards culturally inclusivity within counselor education research. This study also highlighted the use of my conceptual framework throughout the data analysis and acting as a critical Sankofa in furthering the discussion of supporting Black women who wish to emerge from the sunken place and exist fully (and well) in academic spaces. In the next section of this chapter, I provide a synthesis of literature surrounding three core concepts that pertain to my research study and I critique several key studies that specifically relate to my topic, method, and research purpose.

Literature Review of Core Concepts

My emphasis for this section of the literature review was to retrieve and synthesize literature on the core concepts of internalized oppression, academic presence, and wellness as they relate to my research study. More explicitly, in this section I identified the strengths and gaps in research study design, expound upon concepts based on my research questions, and provide empirically supported rationale for my study. The salient features of my dissertation's core constructs and subtopics that I explore within

my study are enmeshed with one another and thus, organically represent the interconnectedness demonstrated in my conceptual framework that grounds my dissertation. As such, in each section there is overlap between subtopics, including various sources cited throughout the literature review as reflected in my conceptual framework. For instance, the literature on the SBW schema and internalized stereotypes overlap between academic presence and wellness.

Likewise in the section discussing Black women's lived experiences of oppressive stereotypes in academia I reflect how these experiences impact wellness. In this section, I provide a review of literature of the two core concepts that are critical to my study's research question, internalized stereotypes (i.e., SBW, ABW) and academic presence, describing the subtopic of (un)wellness within each core concept. I then present a thorough review of research with consideration to seminal scholarship, studies with similar research design, summarizing and synthesizing the literature and its application to my study.

Historical Origins for Stereotypical Tropes of Black Women

Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2003) contributed to discourse on feminist theory through inclusion and emphasis on the use of conceptual frameworks developed by Black feminists. To challenge the current frameworks available for studying Black women, researchers have recognized the necessity of acknowledging the unique experiences of Black women due to their positionality in multiple oppressed groups (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Chan et al., 2018; Collins, 2009). Rooted in the historical aftermath post-slavery, there are special considerations for the way in which Black women

experience womanhood that is a culmination of the intersecting identities of being – *Black* and being a – *woman*. To understand Black feminist theorists and scholars, one must also understand the foundation of feminist theory, which was derived from a White feminist context (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003).

Collins (2009) and Dillard (2000) addressed this gap with the foundation of BFT and EF, respectively. The polarity of media and historical contexts for identifying strength has had a negative impact on Black women who often suffer disparities and oppression due to race and gender. Attention towards research that will seek to understand the lived experiences of Black women would be beneficial in reshaping the narrative regarding how to properly use Afrocentric theories in the context of counselor education and within the counseling profession (Shillingford, 2013). Without an understanding of the images and stories that existed for Black woman, it would be difficult to ascertain the pervasiveness of the ISI in educational settings.

The implications derived from the Beauboeuf-Lafontant's (2003) article, though dated, are still pertinent to the contribution to theoretical foundation for understanding the ISI, like the SBW. For instance, Thomas et al. (2004) discussed the historical context and inception of the ISI for Black women, including the superwoman, also referred to as the SBW. According to Thomas et al., Black women fall into four subsections of stereotypical roles, that include (a) Superwoman, (b) Jezebel, (c) Mammy, and (d) Sapphire, which contain characteristics that reject help and view persistence despite circumstances as strength.

The Mammy archetype represents the characterization of Black women as perpetual caregivers who are willing to engage in servitude (Collins, 2009; Thomas et al., 2004). The controlling images used, for instance, often depict older Black women in slavery or housekeeper contexts with smiling faces. The Jezebel archetype stems from the oversexualization of Black women that portrays Black women as manipulative and seductive, which was used to justify sexual victimization of enslaved Black women. The Sapphire archetype has been depicted as a controlling woman, who emasculates her male counterpart and for Black women, depicts a woman who is “aggressive, loud, or rageful” (Thomas et al., 2004, p. 429). Black feminist scholars suggest that attempts to create a positive image of Black women led to the archetypes of Superwoman or SBW, preferring to depict strength and resilience against all odds (Collins, 2009). Additionally, research on gendered racism suggests that the role of spirituality for Black women may contribute to internalized beliefs of strength (Jones & Harris, 2019; Watson-Singleton, 2017; Watson & Hunter, 2016).

Further, Thomas et al. (2004) distinguished that the Jezebel, Mammy, and Sapphire role each stemmed from slavery, whereas the Superwoman or SBW is a fusion of these archetypes that promote survival and strength. However, research suggests that the SBW stereotype continues to create similar negative impact like the other tropes and has taken on additional characteristics that reinforce negative depictions of Black women. The SBW schema represents certain characteristics (i.e., self-reliance, fortitude, taking care of others) and holds perceptions of expected behavior regarding interactions with

others. The Stereotypical Roles for Black Women Scale (SRBWS) measures perceptions of strength in challenging situations (Thomas et al., 2004; Watson-Singleton, 2017).

Another stereotypic trope discussed by Thomas et al. (2004) was that of the Sapphire archetype or what is known as the ABW. The ABW schema has similarities and differences with SBW schema. For example, both ABW and SBW represent historical roots in controlling images that portray Black women as angry, combative, and possessing superhuman strength that defies the need for attentive care or support for wellness (Jacobs & Davis, 2017; Watson-Singleton, 2017; Watson & Hunter, 2016). Stemming from the Sapphire and Jezebel stereotypical tropes, the ABW specifically represents Black women who are seen as domineering and aggressive (Miles, 2019; Thomas et al., 2004).

Internalized Stereotypes of Identity

Stereotypes describe the beliefs and assumptions held about a particular group or culture of people. The internalization of stereotypes, then, represents the ways in which members of the cultural group may internalize and adopt these beliefs about their own cultural identity and others within these cultural groups (Geyton et al., 2020; Griffin, 2016; West et al., 2016). The internalized stereotypes of identity for Black women are best understood through the knowledge of the historical background of specific cultural stereotypes. There are historical roots of the internalized stereotypes, which are at times referred to as *controlling images*, of Black women and how these stereotypes have transformed slightly over time (Collins, 2009; Geyton et al., 2020; Miles, 2019; Thomas et al., 2004). For instance, the SBW stereotype is traced back to the portrayal of Black

women as willful participants in their unpaid servitude and possessing formidable strength that would support mistreatment or neglect of basic physical, emotional, or psychological needs (Miles, 2019; Thomas et al., 2004; Woods-Giscombé, 2010).

Black women encounter microaggressions based on gendered and racial stereotypes in everyday life that interfere with positive experiences in academic settings (Geyton et al., 2020; Lewis et al., 2016; Watson & Hunter, 2016). There are implications for Black women who internalize negative stereotypes resulting in higher risk for exacerbated effects of overall wellness (Geyton et al., 2020; West et al., 2016). For example, the SBW identity encourages the narrative of being indestructible and invincible, thus causing Black women who internalize this belief to avoid seeking support or intervention for health and well-being (Griffin, 2016; West et al., 2016). Understanding the role of internalization of stereotypes is an important construct of this study as it illuminates the challenges related to health, wellness, and coping that present for Black women.

Specific attention to these experiences within higher education and within the counseling profession could prove beneficial to counselor educators and supervisors; therefore, a closer look at research that specifically addresses microaggressions from the intersections of race and gender are necessary to understand the perceived experiences of Black women. Furthermore, implications from this review of literature on my topic could direct researchers within the counseling profession on approaches and interventions to address these issues and support Black women in the counseling profession and within academic programs like CES.

Recognizing the Nature of Oppression

Oppression is provocative and ever-present throughout many avenues of life but is especially significant when considering the impact of social environment on mental health (Lee et al., 2013). Oppression does not just involve the personal experiences and beliefs of an individual, but ways in which oppression can infiltrate systems, like education, and manifest in procedures and policies that exist without question.

Oppression is also the nature in which both individual and systemic pressures can be internalized or projected on to self and others (Geyton et al., 2020; Lewis et al., 2016; Shillingford, 2013).

Exploring the nature of oppression outside of the individual experience can deter findings from truly capturing the ways in which oppression can be internalized and, therefore, the context and use of personal accounts of experiences, which I call personal (re)collections, should be amplified in research involving Black women (Collins, 2009). Further, as understanding the internalization of oppression can seem unattainable, researchers need to understand the specific features of gendered racism including how it exists in systemic structures and how it presents as controlling images and stereotypes. Particularly, within the scope of my study, oppression will focus on the experiences of Black women, namely myself, in academia, and the internalization of existing oppressive structures, beliefs about my identity as a Black woman, and how other structures in my life, like spirituality, have presented as both a form of wellness and a structure of oppression (resulting in unwellness) at other times. The intersections of these identities are what is critical for this study, as it illuminates the power dynamic of systemic

oppression coupled with controlling images and stereotypes that fuse into what Collins (1986) called the interlocking nature of oppression.

Controlling Images and Stereotypes

According to Shillingford et al. (2013), women of color experience unique difficulties like microaggressions and discrimination in academic settings. Black women encounter microaggressions based on gendered and racial stereotypes in everyday life that interfere with the overall mental wellness experienced by Black women. Black women also suffer from various health disparities based on both their perception of strength as well as practitioners who may neglect to treat issues that present in Black women compared to other women (Henderson et al., 2013; Jerald et al., 2017). The phenomenon of the SBW was explained as a potential cause to the mental and physical health disparity seen in Black women (Nelson et al., 2016).

Similarly, the ABW stereotype has also been linked with mistreatment, misdiagnosis, and negligence of caring for Black women (Erving, 2018). Thomas et al. (2004) presented findings regarding the validation of the Stereotypic Roles for Black Women Scale (SRBWS) used to measure several stereotypes of the Black woman identity. The results from a preliminary factor analysis of self-esteem and the four identified stereotypic roles indicated that women who closely align with the Mammy role (e.g., caregiver) correlated with lower self-esteem. Also, the results indicated a greater significance of the SRBWS on predicting levels of self-esteem compared to the Racial Identity Attitude Scale –B.

Lewis et al. (2016) described the challenges faced by Black women as due to the intersections of race and gender. Both gender and race each carry their own set of stereotypes that could be distressing; furthermore, the intersectionality of these experiences warrants exploration. However, the gap is in the additional microaggressions for being both Black and a woman (Lewis et al., 2016). The authors used a constructivist qualitative approach to studying the experiences of Black women, using semi structured interviews and focus groups for data collection. The participants came from PWIs and were between ages of 19 and 39 years old. Lewis et al. (2016) noted the theoretical assumptions stemmed from Black feminist theory, which accounted for emphasis on the lived experiences of Black women. Lewis et al. reviewed focus group transcripts to analyze the results into coded areas related to gendered and racial experiences of microaggressions. Lewis et al. (2016) discovered three major areas of gendered racial oppression, including stereotypes (i.e., intellectual inferiority or criminality); silencing (i.e., invisibility); and assumptions (i.e., beauty standards) that are experienced among Black women.

Watson and Hunter (2016) conducted a qualitative thematic analysis of the SBW identity to explore the outcomes, both beneficial and detrimental, associated with this stereotypical schema. Watson and Hunter identified three central tensions that are present for Black women who ascribe to the SBW schema: (a) be psychologically durable yet do not engage in behaviors that preserve psychological durability, (b) be equal yet be oppressed, and (c) be feminine yet reject traditional feminine norms. Each tension that the researchers described had similarities in that each represented value in resilience

while dismissing specific acts of obtaining support (even if that support contributes to resilience). Watson and Hunter (2016) collected data that measured the perceptions and experiences of Black women regarding the SBW schema. The results illuminated differences in aspects of the SBW identity based on positionality within the community which is beneficial for my study in revealing the impact of stereotypes within specific intersecting cultural identities.

The implications about gendered racism derived from Lewis et al. (2016) and Watson and Hunter (2016) could have tremendous benefits if applied strategically to the field of CES. For instance, understanding gendered racial experiences of Black women is essential to the commitment to multicultural competence for supervisors to address unique challenges when working with Black women in a counseling supervision relationship. More specifically, using the results of these qualitative studies could influence further study on the experiences of Black women enrolled in CES doctoral programs, especially given the nature of the field which aims to foster atmospheres that induce trust and safety to address any microaggressions that could exist within academic spaces that create unsafe spaces for the learners themselves (Lewis et al., 2016; Watson & Hunter, 2016).

West et al. (2016) surveyed 113 Black women students from an urban university in New England and used a demographic survey and a selection of six open-ended questions. The following two questions were particularly interesting to me for my study. “In your own words, please describe a Black woman that represents the Strong Black Woman image? and “if you identify with some or all aspects of the Strong Black Woman

image, do you feel like this image affects your mental health?” (West et al., 2016). Ninety responses were included for the first question and more prevalent descriptors included: “strong/assertive, independent, caring, and religious” (West et al., 2016, p. 398). Broken down further, 57% of respondents described the SBW as strong/assertive, 36% of respondents identified independence (i.e., including financial and romantic independence), 26% reported SBW as caring, and 12% described SBW as religious. Regarding the second question on the impact of SBW identity on mental health, 83 responses were included. Results showed that 57% of respondents provided the affirmative response of “yes” to indicate that SBW identity did impact their mental health (West et al., 2016, p. 402). Forty-six of the participants who provided an affirmative response expounded on their answer to add whether this impact was negative or positive. Fifty-two percent of these responses noted that the impact was negative, with some reporting symptoms of stress and pressure to suppress emotions related to traumatic experiences. West et al. (2016) acknowledged the complexity of results with some respondents reporting finding the SBW as a positive attribute. Even so, the results of this study yielded results specific to Black women in college setting worth noting including responses that described the SBW within the specific educational context like “hardworking/ambitious, educated, and self-confidence” (West et al., 2016, p. 404).

Code Switching (Identity Shifting)

Identity shifting, also referred to as code switching, are actions Black women may take to alter their language or behavior in certain environments to reduce or minimize microaggressions and other forms of mistreatment (Dickens et al., 2018; Foxx et al.,

2018; Geyton et al., 2020). Geyton et al. (2020) used social identity theory to specifically examine aspects of internalization with social identity for Black women. Geyton et al. also explored the ways in which those belonging to less socially desirable groups (or those who attributed their social identity with undesirable characteristics) were more likely to engage in *social mobility*, that is, the ability to “move across social groups.”

Geyton et al. (2020) noted three options that those who exercise social mobility may take: (a) exiting – leaving the less desirable social group for the more desirable social group; (b) passing – separating from the previous social group and acting as if a part of a different social group; and (c) voicing – attempting to redefine the current social group. Both exiting and passing involve attempts at joining another social group. Exiting occurs when the individual is completely accepted within the new social group. Passing can be viewed as pseudo membership to the different social group based on characteristics or qualities that may be hard to decipher and thus grant limited access into the desirable social group. Voicing is the only option where the individual may have characteristics or features where they are unable to pass or exit and must then attempt to discredit the attributes accredited to the social group(s) they are members of (Geyton et al., 2020).

Each of the options of social mobility mentioned by Geyton et al. (2020) are interesting for my study, particularly regarding understanding the ways in which Black women with ISI may try to assimilate to dominant culture (Dickens et al., 2018; Foxx et al., 2018; Geyton et al., 2020). Furthermore, I explore a cultural concept of *the sunken place* as one way in which Black people are often expected to sacrifice aspects of any of

these intersecting cultural identities to assimilate to the dominant setting or culture and represents a form of escapism that allows them to dissociate from their Black cultural identity (Dickens et al., 2018; Powell, 2020; Tomaselli et al., 2016). This creates an internalized conflict for Black women who find themselves negotiating between the sunken place and Sankofa practices and the resistance that exists between the two.

Silencing and Social Invisibility

One of the residual effects of oppression and internalization of stereotypes is self-silencing (Geyton et al., 2020). Silencing can occur when Black women's voices are left out of conversations, dismissed, or altered to fit a dominant group narrative (Domingue, 2015). Self-silencing can occur when the risk for voicing or speaking up for self to interrupt oppressive interactions is perceived as much greater than one might be willing to make in certain circumstances, particularly in professional or academic settings (Domingue, 2015). This can also lead to significant burden of Black women feeling silenced and conditioning themselves to remain silent against oppression, both of which can have a detrimental impact on wellness (Domingue, 2015; Geyton et al., 2020; Woods-Giscombé, 2010).

There are aspects of self-rejection that are associated with self-silencing and can be viewed by those in cultural context as a rejection of cultural groups (Collins, 2009; Geyton et al., 2020). This perceived rejection can lead to negative reactions from those within the Black community, and further can lead to scrutinizing the individual's dedication (or lack thereof) towards social justice causes and labeling this individual as being in the sunken place (Powell, 2020; Tomaselli et al., 2016). Like calling a Black

person an *Uncle Tom*, stating that a Black person is in the sunken place is an insult that points out this individual's (seemingly) complicit choice to uphold and protect oppressive systems rather than fight for social justice of the community (Powell, 2020). This compounds mental anguish and belief held by Black women particularly as it reinforces the SBW trope and the pressure to be vocal advocates for the entire Black community even when it is understood that Black women will reap harsh reactions and punishments for speaking up towards oppression (Collins, 2009). There are implications from research that would suggest that controlling images or stereotypes of Black women interfere with their progress or achievement in academic settings.

Abdul-Raheem (2016) studied faculty in higher education and results indicated specific issues facing diverse faculty including the role that tenure could have in creating equitable power status for underrepresented faculty. Further noting that tenured faculty may experience empowerment towards advocacy efforts related to social justice and equality in their academic settings. Additionally, Abdul-Raheem (2016) noted that White faculty held more tenured positions than faculty of color, which is asserted as a major contribution to the power imbalance within higher education. These observations warrant specific exploration of the experiences of Black women faculty in higher education and their perception of their ability to achieve equitable career status.

Expanding upon Abdul-Raheem's (2016) review, Robinson et al. (2019) studied issues regarding equity among women of color at a PWI, particularly in relation to their experiences with diversity (or lack thereof) and its impact on their career trajectory. Robinson et al. (2019) surveyed 14 participants (faculty and students) to explore specific

perceptions of barriers to achievement within academia and found themes related to lack of diversity to be representative across experiences. Demographically, four respondents were faculty women and ten were students. Out of the ten students, three participants represented doctoral students, whereas the remaining seven participants were undergraduate students. Out of the faculty surveyed, three faculty participants were currently employed at their university, and one was no longer affiliated with their university.

Robinson et al. (2019) interpreted the data through a qualitative lens using constructed narratives to describe and analyze the experiences of the participants. They found five themes which included: recruitment and retention, support, inclusive programming, implicit bias, and administrative positions. Responses from this study related to recruitment and retention, support, and implicit bias were of particular interest to me. Robinson et al. (2019) noted that all respondents noted a need for increased diversity regarding visibility, equity, and representation in higher education as it related to recruitment and retention. Regarding implicit bias, although both faculty and student participants noted issues with implicit bias, the results indicated varied experiences between the two groups. Student concerns included professors making offensive comments or singling out student's experiences based on perceived stereotypes, both scenarios describing a perceived lack of professors' self-awareness of the offense. Alternatively, faculty participants reported implicit bias concerns as feeling tokenized and unheard in departmental meetings. Each of the themes explored highlighted an interconnectedness of unique experiences of students and faculty of color within higher

education. All participants reported lack of support for faculty and students of color at their university, with faculty adding a desire for mentorship for faculty of color (Robinson et al., 2019).

In a quantitative study, Stout et al. (2018) used archival data from the Integrated Post-Secondary Education System (IPEDS) to determine the difference, if any, of graduation rates for underrepresented minority (URM) students versus non-underrepresented minority (non-URM) students across 63 randomly selected post-secondary institutions across all regions in the United States. From their sample of 46,047 URM and 159,456 non-URM, results were significant and indicated a higher average of graduation rates for non-URM than URM.

Additionally, Stout et al. (2018) explored the role that diverse faculty played in relation to graduation rates and found a significant correlation between URM faculty and higher graduation rates at PWIs. Although minority-serving institutions were included in the sample, the researchers acknowledge that the sample from these institutions were small and thus could have contributed to finding no statistical significance between diverse faculty and URM graduation rates (Stout et al., 2018). All in all, understanding how diversity contributes to graduation, empowerment, and overall experiences of Black women in higher education are important aspects of understanding how these factors may contribute to overall (un)wellness.

Internalized Stereotypes and (Un)Wellness

There are several studies found in existing literature that address specific stereotypical roles, like SBW (Domingue, 2015; Geyton et al., 2020; Kaduvettoor et al.,

2009). Geyton et al. (2020) is one such study that particularly relates to my inspection of internalization for Black women who identify with stereotypical tropes. Kaduvettoor et al. (2009) illuminated distinct findings that connect my research study with necessary aspects of CES profession, and specifically addresses cultural competence concerns. Lastly, Domingue's (2015) study presented a narrative design using specific concepts like stereotypes, voicing, and white allyship, worth critiquing for purposes of informing my research design. Thus, these studies were crucial to the development of my research study. Exploring the associations within ISI could offer insight regarding ways to promote strength-based approaches for consideration for working with Black women in academic settings. For my study, I explored how ISI may create conflict between the professional identity development as a counselor educator. Further, I explored how wellness is impacted by these negotiations between congruence and incongruence with intersecting identities.

While there are positive connotations to the SBW identity, like celebrating strength and resilience, there are severe negative outcomes of adopting these identities that can become externalized and internalized beliefs. For example, there are externalized perceptions related to the SBW schema held within society that interfere with equitable treatment, intervention, and diagnosis of both physical and psychological and further perpetuates myth that impact Black women (Jerald et al., 2017; Watson-Singleton, 2017). Watson-Singleton (2017) studied the link between psychological distress and perceived support in African American women. Jerald et al. (2017) and Watson-Singleton (2017) found that these perceptions of strength and identity rooted in stereotypes create obstacles

and challenges for Black women and adds to their perception of having little to no support. Limited research exists regarding the internalized beliefs held by Black women who ascribe to stereotypes like the SBWS and the impact on their mental health and wellness while developing professional identity during their doctoral program; research does exist that emphasizes a link between stereotypes like SBWS that deter Black women from seeking support (Jacob & Davis, 2017; Thomas et al., 2004; Watson-Singleton, 2017; Watson & Hunter, 2016).

Jerald et al. (2017) findings implied there is an association between health (including mental health) and Black women's perception of intersectional discrimination. Jerald et al.'s study also elaborated on the results from Black women who identified themes related to the self-identification of SBW identity and found the presence of meta-stereotype awareness and racial centrality among Black women that impacted physical and mental health. In addition, researchers have explored the SBW identity as it relates to BW's perception regarding strength (Nelson et al., 2016; Watson-Singleton, 2017; Watson & Hunter, 2015) as well as evaluated the relationship between SBW identity and lack of help-seeking as it relates to counseling services, suggesting that BW view asking for help as a weakness (Watson & Hunter, 2015).

Similarly, Nelson et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative research study of Black women's perceptions of the SBW or superwoman role phenomenon, which resulted in identification of both negative and positive associations with the SBW role. Nelson et al. (2016) had a sample of 30 self-identified Black women, ages 18-66 (Mean age = 33.43), and across socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Nelson et al. (2016) recruited

participants via verbal communication, flyers, and emails distributed within the community, at universities, and churches within a metropolitan area of a city in the U.S. The researchers completed thematic analysis of the data to better understand the perceptions and experiences of the Black women who participated in the study (Nelson et al., 2016).

Nelson et al. (2016) indicated the results of their study displayed a significant recognition of the SBW and superwoman role. Additionally, they identified three positions: rejecting, ambivalent, and appropriating. Most participants (77%) endorsed the SBW role, though with mention of several exceptions like discrepancies on belief of emotional containment and other negative attributes of the SBW identity. Nelson et al. (2016) stated: “All of the participants were able to identify perceived benefits and liabilities associated with ascribing to SBW roles” (p. 557).

Several important elements are present in both studies that should be considered. Particularly, Nelson et al. (2016) selected a research method that adequately addressed their two research questions that sought to understand how Black women conceptualize the SBW or superwoman role, as well as explore Black women’s perception (and definition) of strength as it relates to the SBW role. Additionally, Jerald et al. (2017) presented findings that illustrated the importance of the intersectional identity experienced by Black women, with participants of their study affirming a stronger association of their “Black woman” identity than that of being Black or being a woman. This provides insight into ISI and the indication that Black women themselves may be ascribing to this identity more than what has been predicted in previous research.

Quantitative research has also reported the relationship between Black women who identify with the SBW identity and mental health symptoms like depression and anxiety (West et al., 2016; Woods-Giscombé, 2010). Donovan and West (2015) conducted a quantitative study with 92 Black women college students and found a positive relationship between their endorsement of the SBW stereotype and negative mental health symptoms like depression and anxiety. Using SBW endorsement as a moderating variable between stress and mental health symptoms, results indicated a significance presence of depressive symptoms for Black women who had high SBW endorsement and high report of stress levels (Donovan & West, 2015). Donovan and West's (2015) results also supported current literature that suggests Black women who endorse the SBW identity have difficulty asking for help or seeking treatment for mental health symptoms and further disrupts use of coping resources (Woods-Giscombé, 2010). This study highlights the role of ISI that contribute to mental health symptoms and stress that are likely underreported by Black women, especially Black women in mental health and related fields.

Wellness is important to define and understand within the context of ISI and in the cultural landscape of academia, and more specifically, regarding the well-being of Black women in doctoral programs. Considering the rigor of doctoral studies and desire to achieve academic presence, Black women enrolled in doctoral programs with ISI may face additional challenges that impact their wellness. Woods-Giscombé (2010) stated that Black women who ascribe to the SBW identity feel destined to exude strength while simultaneously suppressing emotions. Particularly concerning the ways in which Black

women with ISI may suppress emotions to the point of unwellness – mentally, physically, and spiritually. Consequently, understanding the manifestations of unwellness is equally important when discussing the impact of ISI for Black women in academia (West et al., 2016).

Psychological and Physical (Un)Wellness

Black women's experiences with ISI can interfere with the overall psychological and physiological wellness experienced while enrolled in graduate programs (Bernard et al., 2017; Davis & Brown, 2017; Graham et al., 2016; Porter et al., 2020; Speight, 2007; West et al., 2016). In the counseling setting, culturally competent counselors may be aware of racial and gendered stereotypes regarding Black women, and even more so may recognize how these stereotypes impact overall wellness. Perhaps less known to the counseling profession may be the role of ISI for Black women and how these internalizations may impact wellness. Additionally, research indicates that Black women suffer from various health disparities based on both their perception and others' perceptions (or misperceptions) of strength, resilience, anger, or education related to their treatment issues (Erving, 2018; Henderson et al., 2013; Jerald et al., 2017). When considering the research that connects the co-morbidity of mental health symptoms with physical health issues, understanding Black women's overall wellness is especially critical and timely.

Erving (2018) conducted a quantitative study on the co-morbidity of physical and psychiatric health problems based on gender and ethnicity using the Collaborative Psychiatric Epidemiology Surveys (CPES). Erving analyzed the CPES data from a

sample of 12,787 individuals and examined the differences between ethnicity and gender across common mental health and physical health issues. Women represented 7,511 members of this sample, of which 3,332 participants were Black women.

The results illuminated a well-documented difference that elicits women often report experiencing mental health symptoms associated with internalized displays (e.g., depression) whereas men are more likely to report exhibiting externalized mental health symptoms (e.g., substance use; Erving, 2018, p. 584). Categories of co-morbidity included: no comorbidity, physical only, psychiatric only, and physical-psychiatric comorbidity. Specifically, Erving (2018) found that Black women across the African diaspora (e.g., African American, Caribbean Black, and Spanish Caribbean Black) demonstrated a stronger prevalence of co-occurring physical and mental health issues than other ethnic and gender groups. Further, African American women were found to have almost twice the risk of co-occurring physical and psychiatric concerns than White women represented in the “Physical Only” category.

The results of Erving’s (2018) study hold relevance to my research as they point toward a great risk for Black women who experience threats to wellness as a potential cause of increasing both mental and physical health issues. Additionally, all three categories of Black women ethnic groups displayed a high risk of co-occurring physical health issues when mental health issues are present. Black women were more likely to suffer severe impairment of functioning caused by mental health ailments and are also more likely to endure these mental health problems without treatment than any other ethnic groups (Erving, 2018).

Nelson et al. (2016) found implications regarding mental health help seeking, and perceptions of strength held by Black women that could have a direct impact on overall mental health experiences of Black women. Black women who associate with SBW identity were found to share a belief that they should not show signs of weakness, which can lead to emotional containment and the belief of “holding [it] together” (Nelson et al., 2016). The magnitude of this perception could be a possible barrier towards likelihood of mental health help seeking among Black women and how this informs general practices of wellness among Black women. The endorsement of these beliefs can also indicate a potential impact on reinforcing unwellness practices for Black women who internalize these stereotypical messages of strength (Nelson et al., 2016).

Watson and Hunter (2015) used a quantitative approach to research the impact of the SBW schema as an indication of Black women seeking professional psychological help. Watson and Hunter used a hierarchical regression analysis collected from 95 participants to examine the impact of the SBW identity on the presence of anxiety and depression. More specifically, they used the Stereotypical Roles for Black Women Scale (SRBWS; Thomas et al., 2004) to study specific racial and gendered constructs, including an 11-item Superwoman subscale, and a 5-item Mammy subscale. Watson and Hunter (2015) used the Inventory of Attitudes Toward Seeking Mental Health Services (IASMHS; Mackenzie et al., 2004) which contained 24 items within four subscales measured on a Likert scale. Researchers found that the hypothesis regarding SBW predicting a higher presence of anxiety was supported in the findings (Watson & Hunter, 2015). Additionally, the results showed that the presence of psychological openness and

help-seeking propensity did not significantly predict anxiety, whereas high indifference to stigma did.

The results of these studies illuminated the need to consider the differences across intersections of ethnicity and gender and subsequently identified a gap in research that exists regarding understanding and exploring the importance of intersectional considerations for Black women (Erving, 2018; Jerald et al., 2017). Further, the reality of Black women's higher risk of suffering mental health symptoms in silence is worth noting (Erving, 2018; Jerald et al., 2017; Nelson et al., 2016).

Risk Tolerance

Risk tolerance in the context of academia and Black women is pertinent to this study because it illuminates ways that Black women may feel the need to ignore or diminish aspects of their identity to reduce the risks and barriers that arise from confronting oppressive structures, racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination. Similar to the concept of compassion fatigue, Halloran (2019) described attributes of posttraumatic slave syndrome (PTSS) which stems from intergenerational cultural trauma and stipulates that “negative race relations, prejudice, and oppression have prolonged the trauma of enslavement” (p. 50). Thus, often efforts to mitigate risks reflect a denial of cultural identity that may include code switching (e.g., adjusting language, mannerisms, and culturally specific characteristics to fit into dominant culture) or a general mistrust of living in a hostile society.

Black women often find themselves navigating spaces like academia with mindful consideration of how to minimize risk (Acosta, 2019; Acuff, 2018). However, there is

little known about how aware Black women are of the impact of internalization of oppressive messages, and whether this would compound cultural trauma associated with enslavement. The negative effects of PTSS on Black women in higher education could signify greater risk for Black women who have additionally internalized negative stereotypes of themselves (Halloran, 2019). Bernard et al. (2017) indicated that interventions aimed at helping African American women identify negative cognitions that stem from the imposter phenomenon could help reverse the psychological impact caused by racial and gendered experiences (West et al., 2016). This study was applicable for my research with understanding how critical it is to understand the impact of ISIs on wellness and further helped me explore implications towards supportive efforts for Black women in higher education. More specifically, this research highlighted the gravity of impact of threats to mental wellness that is exacerbated for Black women in environments that lack diversity, cultural sensitivity, and are conducive to unsupportive conditions (West et al., 2016).

Academic Presence

Academic presence signifies the way in which Black women maneuver within academic settings, either knowingly or unknowingly negotiating social capital (as in privileges related to social status) and the ways in which internalized beliefs of cultural identity impact decisions, opportunities, and experiences of Black women while developing professional identity (Acosta, 2019; Acuff, 2018; Balkin et al., 2018; Dickens et al., 2018). Academic presence also illuminates the ways in which Black women are (mis)represented, tokenized, and (un)welcomed in academic spaces, in leadership

positions, within research epistemologies, and in pedagogical practice (Acosta, 2019; Balkin et al., 2018; Dickens et al., 2018). Each of these experiences can compound upon one another, causing significant consequences to Black women's mental and physical well-being (Porter et al., 2020; Shavers & Moore, 2019), which can cause Black women to engage in altering their behavior to reduce risks encountered in these environments (Dickens et al., 2018). Academic presence, as a core concept within my research study, also recognizes the importance of visibility as an aspect of the culture of academia that is pertinent to developing professional identity and longevity within higher education (Acuff, 2018; Fang et al., 2016; Grant & Ghee, 2015; Porter et al., 2020). In my study, I explored the impact of academic presence to illuminate the impact on wellness for Black women in doctoral programs.

Black Women in Academic Settings

One important consideration for my study was an understanding of Black women's experiences in academic settings, particularly an understanding of how these experiences influence Black women's perception of self, their behavior and actions, and the overall wellness and longevity of Black women who wish to pursue careers in higher education (Acosta, 2019; Dickens et al., 2018; Grant & Ghee, 2015). Researchers have begun to address the role of gendered racism against Black women in academic spaces, with a focus on externalized impact. Furthermore, several key aspects related to Black women's experience in academia provide an avenue for exploring internalized oppression, including (mis)representation, socialization and identity development, and navigation of risk tolerance to mitigate harm in hostile and oppressive environments

(Shavers & Moore, 2019; Smith et al., 2019). There is a need for research that will explore the impact of internalization of these experiences on professional development and overall psychological, physical, and spiritual wellness (Acosta, 2019; Balkin et al., 2018; Dickens et al., 2018; Domingue, 2015; Grant & Ghee, 2015). (Mis)representation and socialization and identity development are concepts I explored further in this section.

The educated Black woman (EBW) is an emerging stereotype that promotes a level of strength that causes Black women to perform excellence especially in academic settings to the point of exhaustion and neglecting health (Domingue, 2015). Additionally, another aspect of this theme indicated shared experiences of “voicing” which is when Black women express themselves (i.e., thoughts and opinions) while leading and “silencing” which are times when Black women felt they were discouraged from sharing their opinions, or felt their voicing was minimized, dismissed, or misconstrued (p. 464). The themes that the Black women identified offered insights for shared negative experiences with externalized oppression (i.e., microaggressions; silencing) and its impact on how Black women related to their leadership role.

Domingue (2015) used a phenomenological and theoretical qualitative analysis to study experiences in leadership for Black women college students at PWIs. Stemming from a Black feminist theory framework, this research centered around experiences of Black women historically and within intersectional experiences of invisibility and exclusivity. More specifically, Domingue used in depth interviews to understand Black women’s experiences with oppression and subsequently inquired about which resources they used to persevere through challenges related to gendered racism.

Domingue (2015) noted social coping resources that included connecting with other women of color or Black women through affinity spaces which research suggests resembles historical depiction of Black women gathering to support and look after one another. Even so, this type of support can reinforce the stereotypes of strength, resilience, and caregiving that often opposes seeking help (Watson & Hunter, 2015; West et al., 2016; Woods-Giscombé, 2010). In addition, Black women graduate students in Domingue's (2015) study reported finding mentorship spaces helpful for pursuit of professional endeavors. Thus, based on existing research, it is less likely that Black women use these supportive spaces for themselves (unless related to professional endeavors) but rather to offer support to others.

Domingue (2015) found five themes regarding the experience of Black women college students' experiences as leaders: (a) Community as Motivation to Lead, (b) Entry to College Leadership, (c) Interpersonal Interactions with Oppression, (d) Responses to Interpersonal Interactions with Oppression, and (e) Nurturing Black Women in College Students' Leadership. Of the themes identified, Domingue (2015) highlighted one that was particularly useful for my study, which was "Interpersonal Interactions with Oppression" (p. 459). The Black women who participated in the study noted experiences with racial and gendered stereotypes in the academic settings, namely the ABW and the SBW stereotypes, which perpetuates a characterization of Black women as angry, confrontational, loud, and "difficult to work with" or matronly nurturers, responsible for everyone (pp. 461-462). Additionally, Domingue (2015) found that participants mentioned other stereotypes like the EBW, which appears as a compliment, but

represented microaggressions that are displayed through statements that celebrate being “well-spoken” or unlike other Black women (p. 462).

Domingue’s (2015) study was relevant to my constructs of understanding the impact of internalized stereotypes and its impact on Black women’s wellness in academic spaces. Further, Domingue shared implications for interventions from White allies that can promote leadership and advocacy that aligns with positive self-identity and repel against the harmful stereotypes. Domingue’s (2015) study also informed my study for its emphasis on the intersecting roles of leadership within the identity of Black women. Particularly, as leadership and advocacy roles relate to the CES professional identity. However, Domingue’s study does not specifically indicate the impact of internalizing stereotypes like the EBW, nor does it expound on what makes the supportive experiences that Black women attributed to their efforts to persevere clear. This leaves a gap in understanding for how best to support Black women who internalize their experiences of gendered racism.

Socialization and Identity Development

Black collegiate women have reported significant challenges that arise during graduate study and experiences in predominantly white academic spaces that interfere with professional identity development and their pursuit of careers in higher education (Grant & Ghee, 2015; López et al., 2018; Porter et al., 2020). Researchers have explored reasons for the disparity between the increase of Black women enrolled in doctoral studies who express desire to work in higher education that contradicts the low retention of Black women in faculty or administrative positions (Acosta, 2019; Domingue, 2015;

Grant & Ghee, 2015). Aspirations and exhibiting excellence are attributes used to describe Black women in higher education settings (Acosta, 2019; Balkin, 2017; López et al., 2018). Closer examination of these attributes revealed that aspirational goals within academia comes with great cost for Black women who wish to matriculate within higher education (Grant & Ghee, 2015) and who often strive towards excellence at the detriment of their own health (Dillard, 2021; Erving, 2018). Even so, aspects of SBW identity celebrate excellence despite adversity. My study explored how socialization and identity is developed for Black women while in academic spaces that either support or oppose the ideals of the SBW.

In a qualitative study, Porter et al. (2020) explored Black women's socializations and created an extension to Porter's revised model of identity development in Black undergraduate women to analyze findings from a focus group. This study's focus group participants were five undergraduate Black women who were asked to describe their socialization during their collegiate experience. Porter et al. (2020) reported findings that reflected how Black women value having shared spaces to converse with and support one another in a group-like settings. Additionally, they found that Black collegiate women sought these spaces to reaffirm and validate experiences unique to Black women. Porter et al. found a significant connection between forming connections through relationship and community building of which Black women participants attributed to their success.

Porter et al. (2020) addressed the implications found from studying connectedness, self-identity, and socialization for Black collegiate women as major themes explored in their study. Researchers can continue exploring the idea of

connectedness by integrating theoretical frameworks that acknowledge the significance of connectedness and collective experiences of Black women. More specifically, within the structure of my research design and theoretical perspectives from BFT and EF, this study informs the major constructs of my study regarding academic presence and connectedness for Black women. One of the delimitations of the Porter et al. (2020) study was the focus on undergraduate Black women. Replication of this study to include Black women in doctoral programs would be valuable especially related to studying Black women's sense of connectedness and belonging in academic and particularly higher education settings. Researchers can continue exploring the idea of connectedness by integrating theoretical frameworks that acknowledge the significance of connectedness and collective experiences of Black women.

Similarly, Shavers and Moore (2019) also studied the experiences of Black women and their socialization by researching specific challenges at PWIs and how these experiences impacted their psychological and physical well-being. Shaver and Moore used a qualitative design and conducted fifteen semistructured interviews with Black female doctoral students. They solicited these participants using purposive sampling, and then later snowball sampling methods. Researchers collected data from 45–60-minute semistructured interviews, and follow-up procedures included inviting each participant to review the themes with an option to comment.

Within their qualitative design, Shavers and Moore (2019) used tenets of BFT to influence their study's design, particularly regarding how knowledge is attained through studying Black women's lived experiences, that these experiences are both shared and

unique experiences, and lastly that the intersections of multiple identities provide complexity in context of these experiences (Collins, 2000; Shavers & Moore, 2019). Shavers and Moore (2019) identified three subthemes: (a) unwelcoming spaces, (b) tokenism, and (c) outsiders at home. Unwelcoming spaces were identified as experiences where the participants felt like outsiders and further shared explicit encounters with discrimination. Shavers and Moore's results were helpful for informing aspects of my study related to understanding Black women's experiences at PWIs.

Tokenism. Tokenism was another shared experience with participants feeling like they were a status symbol of diversity and yet not valued for their contributions. Jagers (2020) called this "fake inclusion" and described participants who felt that despite being given the impression that their voice regarding issues of diversity and inclusion were valued, when they offered insights into how to make changes, they were met with delays, hesitation, and lack of necessary support to bring sufficient change. Outsiders at home described the experiences of the participants who began to feel like outsiders among family members, noting that although supportive of their doctoral journey were unable to relate to the graduate college experience (Shavers & Moore, 2019). The participants were first-generation doctoral students and often felt that their families were unable to understand their experiences and thus unable to offer support to them during stressful times.

Both Shavers and Moore (2019) and Porter et al. (2020) reported findings that identified unique issues related to how Black women's experiences with socialization during graduate study impacted development of professional identity and their well-

being. Both studies used a Black feminist lens to frame their research design, using Black women to tell their own stories regarding these experiences either through interviews or focus groups. Additionally, both studies highlighted academic presence through socialization as important themes shared by their participants as having significant impact on their experiences. More specifically, when socialization was stifled by discriminatory practices, Black women described feelings of being othered or feeling like an unwelcomed outsider, the impact on emotional well-being is described by participants as traumatic (Porter et al., 2020; Shavers & Moore, 2019). Shavers and Moore (2019) found that experiences of discrimination had a tremendous impact on whether their participants felt welcomed at the university and subsequently impacted how involved they were following specific negative encounters. Porter et al. (2020) also addressed the complex issue of tokenism, which makes Black women highly visible in academic settings, but also coupled with experiences of invisibility as it pertains to feeling valued.

(Mis)representation. In the process of understanding the experiences of Black women in academia, researchers must consider the role of representation and address how Black women are misrepresented based on stereotypes (Shavers & Moore, 2019; Smith et al., 2019). One unique aspect impacting Black women include hypervisibility and invisibility, a dichotomous experience of Black women feeling unwelcomed in academic spaces while at other times feeling misrepresented and used as tokens of diversity based on stereotypes (Overstreet, 2019; Shavers & Moore, 2019; Smith et al., 2019). Representation within academia can be multilayered, including the visibility of Black women in positions of administration, as educators, and as students. Representation

can also distinguish the ways in which Black women are portrayed or characterized by those in academia that may alter how Black women are considered for opportunities, how behavior can be misinterpreted as “angry” or combative (Acosta, 2019; Dickens et al., 2018; Shavers & Moore, 2019).

(Mis)representation for Black women in academic settings is also multifaceted as it can signify visible representation, as in reflecting diversity among faculty, administrators, and students, and it describes the ways in which Black women are expected to behave and thus misrepresented when they fail to perform in stereotypical roles in academic spaces (Acosta, 2019; Balkin et al., 2018; Dickens et al., 2018). Particularly for my study, it will be important to understand how internalization for Black women may increase desire for witness representation or influence decisions to avoid misrepresentation in academia settings.

Both Porter et al. (2020) and Shavers and Moore (2019) provided a multifaceted exploration of the types of challenges shared by participants while also reflecting the different avenues for coping from these experiences. Additionally, both studies used tenets that reinforce my conceptual framework, including the richness of studying from an intersectional lens, and the role of dialogue with other Black women through counter storytelling or a *sista circle*, which is used to amplify the individual experience (Porter et al., 2020; Shavers & Moore, 2019). The results of both studies inform several concepts used in my study, including academic presence, self-identity and belonging, and professional identity development for Black women. More specifically, Shavers and Moore (2019) provided insight into several areas of interest related to my research topic,

such as sense of belonging, physical and mental health (or wellness), and tokenism. Particularly, related to unwelcoming spaces and tokenism, the findings are pertinent concepts within my study's purpose.

Even so, neither of these studies explored the ways in which these experiences described by participants might be internalized and how the experiences of tokenism, feeling unwelcomed (Shavers & Moore, 2019), and need for supportive community spaces (Porter et al., 2020) impact Black women's academic presence and wellness. Building from each of the findings and the emphasis on individuality of experiences, I can support my rationale for conducting an autoethnography of my lived experiences of internalized experiences and how these experiences reflect to the community spaces I am a part of, such as my participation in culturally specific, sacred sister circles (Adams et al., 2015; Boylorn, 2016; Ellis, 2004). My study explored aspects of wellness for Black women with ISI and will include exploration of strategies for coping that will highlight the role of culturally specific affinity spaces.

The phenomenon of the SBW has been explained by researchers as a potential cause to the mental and physical health disparity seen in Black women (Nelson et al., 2016; Watson-Singleton, 2017; Watson & Hunter, 2016). Similarly, the ABW stereotype has been linked with mistreatment, misdiagnosis, and negligence of caring for Black women. Similarly, the ABW and EBW are often synonymous in their portrayals of Black women who are in leadership or advocacy roles being deemed as domineering, pushy, and masculine, which may be especially perceived in Black women who are in roles designated to impact social justice (Watson-Singleton et al., 2021).

Academic Presence and (Un)Wellness

Black women's experiences with wellness within the context of higher education is also necessary for my study, particularly when considering the reported experiences of stress and discrimination that may exacerbate or predicate mental health issues (Mekawi et al., 2020; Nelson et al., 2020; Watson-Singleton et al., 2021; West et al., 2016). There is a lack of research that explicitly represents the need for an in-depth exploration of Black women's experiences of gendered racism in academia, ISI, and (un)wellness (Abdul-Raheem, 2016; Robinson et al., 2019). These unique experiences within the educational context exacerbate Black women's use of avoidant coping methods, like disengagement or emotional suppression, that could prove detrimental to their overall well-being (Lewis et al., 2017; Woods-Giscombé et al., 2016).

Several studies found in literature were applicable to my study and possessed implications that supported my inclusion of wellness in my conceptual framework. For instance, while both Porter et al. (2020) and Shavers and Moore (2019) emphasized the importance of connectedness for Black women, Porter et al. (2020) focused on results that indicated Black women often seek opportunities to build relationships with one another, whereas Shavers and Moore (2019) highlighted the impact of Black women perception of being unwelcomed in predominantly white spaces. Both studies had results that are important to reflect the shared and multifaceted experiences of Black women related to academic presence. Shavers and Moore (2019) provided insight into several areas of interest related to my research topic, such as sense of belonging, physical and mental health (or wellness), and tokenism. Particularly, related to unwelcoming spaces

and tokenism, the findings are pertinent concepts within my study's purpose. Whereas Porter et al. (2020) focused on the aspects of community that Black women reported as beneficial to their success. Acuff (2018) provided insight into challenges Black women face in PWIs related to hypervisibility. Acosta (2019) discussed ways in which Black women construct meaning and identity for themselves as educators. In this section, I expound on these two articles, providing critique related to the specific pertinence for my research study.

Acuff (2018) highlighted the impact of using the authenticity of lived experiences to help Black women in academic spaces cope with the hypervisibility in addition to promoting the learning of others. Acuff (2018) described her individual experiences related to cultural identity as a Black woman educator and the strategies she developed to withstand the challenges she faced while teaching in predominantly white spaces, such as navigating the personal and professional impact of Trayvon Martin's death. Embracing what she describes as a pedagogy of courage and vulnerability, Acuff's (2018) research was framed with inspiration from critical theorists and support from literature on racial battle fatigue. Acuff used narratives mixed with artifacts (i.e., emails) to describe her experience as an educator at a PWI navigating her role as an educator and her connection to Black experiences, like the death of Black men, women, and children. Acuff found two types of pedagogies, reality pedagogy and pedagogy of vulnerability that justified the sharing of these experiences in the classroom environment.

Acuff (2018) cited Emdin's (2016) *reality pedagogy*, which has supported the aspect of teaching from a place that allows for inclusion of each student's cultural lens

and Brantmeier's (2013) *pedagogy of vulnerability*, which was expounded on using tenets from critical theorists and insists that educators use their social positionalities and experiences for critical reflections that exposes students to diverse, humanistic models of teaching. Further, Acuff (2018) reported the use of BFT and womanism as guides into supporting her vulnerability efforts. Both theories encapsulate aspects of Black femininity and intersectionality. This resulted in a two-fold impact: (a) self-care as a means towards self-development as a Black woman educator, and (b) using vulnerable and reality pedagogies to bring real-world societal issues into the learning environment to enhance student learning (Acuff, 2018; hooks, 1994).

Acuff (2018) provided insight into her shift of identity and pedagogical practice after witnessing police brutality, specifically naming two instances with Black male children, and offered a framework that incorporates vulnerability, reflexivity, and courage to aid in self-coping while also providing opportunities for her students to engage in a meaningful way. She offered explicit vulnerability into her challenges with ideals of strength, fortified by the SBW ideals and the process she engaged in to embrace both strength and vulnerability.

Acuff (2018) noted a limitation in her work to include the emphasis on her reactions to death of Black men and Black boys, while acknowledging the prevalence of Black women and Black girls suffering highly visible and publicized violence and hate crimes as well. This provides an opportunity to explore the impact for Black women in academia when the death is that of Black women and Black girls, recognizing the psychological impact of identifying with the victims whose invisibility in media is

vicariously experienced through comparison to the male counterparts, and also the hypervisibility that carries external (and internal) expectations that attempt to micromanage Black women's displays of strength, anger, or coping after these public injustices. Additionally, Acuff (2018) represents a Black woman in a faculty role, which only portrays one side of this issue. With a dual emphasis on her own professional development as well as the benefit of how using vulnerability to share her process for student's learning, my research focuses on the impact using a similar approach from the perspective of a Black woman as a student.

Acuff's (2018) work also informed my rationale for using evocative and analytical approaches to research through culturally grounded epistemologies. More specifically, the insights from Acuff's scholarly work supported my autoethnography as a multilayered process of: (a) an in-depth self-exploration of how my intersecting social identities as a Black woman doctoral student at a PWI are impacted by events of gendered racism, hostility, and oppressive systems, and (b) how I navigated creating academic presence with professors and peers towards CES professional identity development while also recognizing the impact on my emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. Acuff's (2018) work provided further insight into the ways in which identity is critical to understanding of how Black women view themselves within academia.

Similarly, Acosta (2019) used discourse analysis to understand the role of negative stereotypes and perception of effectiveness with community nominated Black women educators. Additionally, Acosta explored the Black women's perception of professional positionality as educators within Black community, particularly related to

strength and their roles within academic and community settings. For recruitment, Acosta (2019) used a community nomination process which consisted of three 60-minute focus groups held one week apart with African American parents and caregivers from a church in an African American community, an afterschool program, and a community-based organization that supported families. The focus groups developed criteria of a “good teacher” that included items like “challenge children to do their best every day” or “are tough” (Acosta, 2019, p. 28). From the focus groups, twelve educators were nominated and extended an invitation to participate in this research study. At the end of the recruitment process, four educators plus Acosta were identified as participants of the study.

Acosta (2019) and the four other participants identified as Black women educators born in the South. Additional demographics were reported in the biographical sketches related to their educational background, upbringing including parents’ professions, and general age group. One participant was born in 1970s, another born in 1950s, two born in 1960s, and one born in 1980s. Four participants were raised by both parents. One participant had African American parents who were both educators; another participant’s African American parents were both farmers; another participant’s African American mother was a homemaker and African American father was a skilled laborer; and another participant’s African American mother was an office manager and African American father was an educator. One participant was raised by her African American mother and African American grandmother who were both community teachers at a church.

Acosta (2019) used partially structured guided conversations in a group format, meeting five times across three months to explore how each participant perceived their strengths as educators. Acosta noted the intentionality of this research design to model a collaborative research approach, where the participants were included in the information gathering and united by the research focus on their professional positionality as Black women educators. Findings revealed several themes that included: (a) navigating the school system as parents of Black children; (b) dispositions and perspectives of new Black teachers; (c) differences in teaching styles; (d) problems with existing characterizations of effective teaching; and (e) emergence of Black teaching styles.

Acosta's (2019) study highlighted attributes of Black women educators that are interesting in relation to my research topic. For example, her findings focused on how Black women educators constructed their identity as professionals as well as their identity of themselves as educators. Acosta (2019) found that these Black women closely aligned their self-identity with their professional identity of teaching, particularly emphasizing their role as educators to dispel stereotypes like the superhero or bodyguard, which often leads to work overload, or expectation for Black women educators to compensate for colleagues who lack in skills. This is particularly helpful for my study in understanding the complexity of self-identity as Black women and how this may or may not align with professional identity as educators.

One consideration worth noting in Acosta's (2019) study was the researchers' focus on primary education, which is a different population than my interest in Black women in counselor education programs aimed at educating adult learners. There may be

similar challenges that are worth noting for my study, but I must remain aware that primary education may have more community influences than in the higher education system. Another consideration of Acosta's (2019) study that was useful for my research design was the use of purposive sampling using community members for nomination of the five participants found for this study. This method of recruitment is particularly interesting to my study because it speaks to the value of including community members, especially when studying topics related to Black women. For my study, it will be particularly important for me to balance my autoethnographic data with input and reflections from within the intersecting cultural groups that I am exploring.

The Cost of Excellence

Despite Black women's motivation to strive towards excellence, achievement gaps and low retention remain for Black students (Balkin, 2017; López et al., 2018; Watson & Hunter, 2015; West et al., 2016). López et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative study to assess the achievement gap at a large public university from 2000 to 2015. Using critical race theory as theoretical framework along with the construct of intersectionality, the authors examined disparities in completion rates for full-time students. More specifically, they examined the effects of systemic and historical racism and found significant achievement gaps based on social location. Black students represented the largest achievement gap across the demographics studied, particularly related to developmental courses.

Balkin (2017) discussed the obstacles experienced by African Americans when striving for *life balance* that demonstrated an addictive-like pattern for overworking that

differed from others in the study. Balkin attributed this difference to wage disparities and workplace discrimination; however, also noted that much of the research regarding life balance and career patterns in African Americans has been “largely ignored and sorely undertheorized” (p. 78). To expound on the obstacles presented, Black people are often perceived as being less qualified than their peers in work settings, thus, this work addiction may stem from the desire to disprove this stereotype.

Evans-Winters (2019) described the maneuvering required for Black women to thrive and create an academic presence in what she calls “intellectual migrations”—the way in which Black women have learned to “compromise, negotiate, and balance the needs of the institution and [our] struggles for social, economic, political, and educational liberations” (p. 13). Geyton et al. (2020) also addressed social mobility and ways that Black women with ISI attempt to navigate academic terrains for advancement. Fang et al. (2016) conducted a cross-sectional study to identify barriers to doctoral nursing students pursuing faculty careers. Using a survey research methodology and mixed methods research design, Fang et al. found that minority students tend to be more inclined to express desire to pursue academic career paths. However, there was a discrepancy between the number of students who reported plans for academic careers and those who actualized these desires. Fang et al. (2016) attributed this discrepancy to limited access to motivating factors like mentorship and negative experiences can significantly deter plans to pursue careers in academia post-graduation.

Bernard et al. (2017) studied the frequency of racial and gendered experiences, imposter phenomenon, and three categories of mental health symptoms (e.g., depressive,

anxious, and interpersonal sensitivity) among 157 incoming first-year African American college students. With the use of several surveys and scales, Bernard et al. (2017) used descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations to analyze results from a series of surveys and scales (i.e., Clance's Imposter Scale [CIS; Clance & Imes, 1978]; Symptom Checklist 90-Revised [SCL-90-R; Derogatis, 2000]; Daily Life Experiences Scale [DLE; Harrell, 1994]) related to imposter phenomenon, discrimination, and gender. Results indicated included identifying contributing factors to imposter phenomenon among collegiate African American women and found that those with an increased number of negative experiences based on race or gender reported higher levels of imposter phenomenon.

CES Professional Identity and (Un)Wellness

There are cultural aspects that occur systemically within academia that can increase understanding of the experiences of Black women and particularly trends of upholding internalized beliefs of resilience and excellence even to the detriment of wellness and health (Acosta, 2019; Piccardi et al., 2018). These studies provided insight into the culture of academia, particularly for Black women, and informed my research design and purpose, which were specific to experiences of Black women within the CES profession. I explored existing research that illuminates Black women's experiences in academia, with a focus on the CES identities of researcher and advocate. All five roles of the CES identity (i.e., researcher, counselor, educator, leader and advocate, and supervisor) are each critical to the profession in different ways, however, my rationale for

excluding the others is solely to narrow the focus of this study in hopes that the results would provide future research implications for each of the five CES roles.

Research related specifically to Black women's experience in CES programs is scarce. However, research on the CES professional identity yielded results that helped identify components of professional development that are specific to CES programs and profession which can then be applied to the purposes of my study. Understanding how perception impacts systemic change could be useful in various disciplines and promote movement towards systemic change specifically in educational learning environments (Foxx et al., 2018; Kaduvettoor et al., 2009; Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018; Woo et al., 2016).

Foxx et al. (2018) used a phenomenological study to understand what contributes to diversity in CES programs. More specifically, they used purposive sampling from one university to interview nine current CES students about important aspects that impacted their selection of a doctoral program. Demographically, five participants identified as African American, one participant identified as Asian, two participants identified as Latina/o, and one participant identified as Other (Foxx et al., 2018). Ultimately, Foxx et al. (2018) found that diversity was a major factor that prospective students searched for in their CES program which indicates a prominent for universities and institutions of higher learning to engage with topics concerning diverse students.

Although Foxx et al. (2018) identified the racial and gendered experiences of Black women in higher education, there is a need for deeper introspective discussion of the ISI within academia that may be especially beneficial for educators and professionals

within the CES field who strive towards diversity, inclusion, and belonging. This creates a call to action to stretch beyond representing diversity, and towards social change efforts devoted to improving the quality of experiences of diverse students. More specifically, it is essential that social change research within the CES field is influenced by ethical standards of competency, and thus, increasing the awareness of how crucial representation of the experiences of Black women in research is to the future of the profession.

Cultural Inclusivity

Kaduvettoor et al. (2009) used a mixed methods research study design to evaluate three areas: multicultural events, group climate, and multicultural competence. The researchers used a sample size of 136 counselor trainees as participants and reported this sample included 94 women, 25 men, and 17 participants who were “unspecified.” The racial demographic breakdown was as follows: seven participants identified as African Americans; five participants identified as Asian Americans; seven participants identified as Latino/a, one participant identified as Middle Eastern; one participant identified as Native American; 95 participants identified as White; two participants identified Other; and 16 participants declined to specify. Additionally, four participants identified as gay, lesbian, or queer; seven participants identified as bisexual; 106 participants identified as heterosexual; and 19 participants declined to specify. Participants represented a mixture of master’s level and doctoral level counselors-in-training with 19 participants who declined to specify education level (Kaduvettoor et al., 2009).

Kaduvettoor et al. (2009) used Multicultural Events in Group Supervision Questionnaire (MEGSQ) to extrapolate qualitative data using open-ended questions to report situations that involved multicultural related issues. Kaduvettoor et al. used descriptive statistics to highlight common themes from the questionnaires and used preliminary and between-subjects analysis to compare the relationship between the variables in relation to participant's demographic background. Results related to shared experiences stemming from group supervision, experiencing multicultural events, and impact of supervisor's involvement in multicultural events indicated a connection between perception of growth and multicultural competence following these interactions. Results also indicated a relationship between education level and conflict following a multicultural event occurring during supervision (Kaduvettoor et al., 2009).

Although Kaduvettoor et al. (2009) focused on the supervision identity of a CES professional, this study also illuminates the importance of incorporating culturally responsive approaches throughout all the CES domains, including research and advocacy. Primarily, one area that has influenced my research design is the expressed needs of having those in positions of authority, which in this study are supervisors, to intercede with issues related to multicultural identities to further professional development. Furthermore, the use of mixed methods study design assisted in gathering rich data including the collection of narratives behind the multicultural events shared among participants. Additionally, Kaduvettoor et al. (2009) used purposive sampling and generated data from their participants which is particularly informative for my study design.

A limitation of the Kaduvettoor et al. (2009) study was that it is dated beyond ten years at the time of writing this literature review. Even so, as discussed earlier in this chapter, I used citation chaining and cross referencing through Google Scholar for older articles as a part of decision-making process for inclusion in this literature review. As such, Google Scholar showed that the Kaduvettoor et al.'s article has been cited 52 times. Of those citations, fourteen have been within the past five years and this provided a rationale for use of the pertinent information. Therefore, I considered the benefits from the article that indicate further research considerations and found these outweighed the limitations.

The Kaduvettoor et al. (2009) findings were applicable to my study and essential for informing practical implications using examples from lived experiences to endarken the need for cultural inclusivity and responsiveness. Especially within domains, like research where this type of diversity is at times neglected (or co-opted), the impact of advancing and encouraging the use of culturally specific research practices without centering Eurocentric ideals can create effective social change (Foxy et al., 2018). Kaduvettoor et al. (2009) highlighted how efforts related to social change, diversity, and advocacy appear to be unique features of the CES profession.

Both Domingue (2015) and Kaduvettoor (2009) had findings that informed my research study and further expounded on the research topic related to academic presence, leadership, and Black women's experiences of gendered racism in academic settings. Domingue (2015) addressed specific experiences of Black women related to microaggressions and stereotypes like the SBW and the EBW. Additionally, Kaduvettoor

et al. (2009) illuminated the barriers that exist within CES related to lack of understanding of multicultural competency that impact Black women's experiences in professional settings.

I explored the impact of gendered racial experiences and ISI that stifle Black women in their doctoral program, particularly in counselor education, exploring the challenges from entrance into CES professional studies towards completion of the dissertation. Navigating the counseling profession without adequate support and culturally competent supervision could cause more harm than good for future learners. There is a need for more research that focuses on the impact of internalized beliefs that impact Black women to bridge the gap between understanding and responsiveness that is necessary to develop culturally specific theories and approaches to counselor education, counseling, research, and advocacy. In the next section, I explored the implications of ISI as it pertains to Black women and their academic presence.

Leadership and Advocacy

Research regarding the benefits of studying social change aspects in graduate programs, workplace environments, and curriculum is important and has implications for use within the counselor education and related fields (Foxy et al., 2018; Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018; Tevis et al., 2020). Aspects that support leadership and professional identity development are mentorship, holistic identity, and professional contribution (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018; Peters & Miles Nash, 2021; Woo et al., 2016). For my research, there will be an aspect of acknowledging the significant impact that could come from addressing my research problem. Even so, my dissertation will specifically focus on

ways in which my research design fuses leadership and advocacy roles with research practice by engaging and advocating for culturally congruent research methodology.

Nkambule and Amsterdam (2018) developed a case study qualitative research design to explore the social change impact that educator perception of support has on primary educators in South Africa. Nkambule and Amsterdam used purposive sampling to study participants who were recruited from three primary school sites. The researchers' data collection consisted of qualitative interviews and focus groups, field observations, and archival data. The authors used a content analysis process, including descriptive coding, to identify themes and patterns (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018). They identified four themes: (a) expectations of support from external sources, (b) participant experiences of support from external sources, (c) expectations of support from internal sources, and (d) participant experiences of support from internal sources (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018, p. 4). Their results indicated a common perception that viewed oversight and visits from officials as "surveillance" and not support. The participants noted that a lack of attention from supporting staff impacted morale among the primary educators interviewed and is consistent with similar research.

In critique, Nkambule and Amsterdam's (2018) article had important insights regarding the lived experiences of primary school educators and the need for further research on perceptions of support by educators. However, this study was set in South Africa and thus these insights may not be transferable to North American culture. Additionally, this research study was designed to understand the experience of educators

with support, however the results yielded multiple themes regarding definition of support that could use further exploration to increase reliability and validity.

Peters and Miles Nash (2021) expounded upon research on Black women's leadership roles in educational settings and provided a framework that examined three dimensions of research: (a) historical foundation of Black women's leadership in schools and communities, (b) epistemological basis of Black women's experiences with gendered racism, and (c) ontological description of Black women's resistance against anti-Black racism within educational settings. Peters and Miles Nash (2021) found four tenets characterizing intersectional leadership as: explicitly anti-racist, explicitly anti-sexist, explicitly acknowledges influences of marginalization of gender and race across intersections of identity, and explicitly leverages authority to protect historically underserved communities. Each of these four tenets carries significant weight when considering how Black women in leadership may feel an increased duty to uphold all these tenets even to the detriment of their well-being. Most pertinent to my study is understanding the implications from historical and epistemological approaches related to Black women in leadership.

Peters and Miles Nash (2021) found research that reported the historical, embodied trauma related to the danger involved with Black women and Black girls seeking education who were often targets of hate crimes. Even so, Black women were vocal through social justice efforts during civil rights movements and continue to be vocal in movements like *Black Lives Matter*, which was started by three Black, queer women, or the #SayHerName social justice movement created to call attention to the lack

of media coverage of Black women who died due to police brutality (Peters & Miles Nash, 2021). Understanding Black women's role in leadership in history is critical to understanding the role Black women continue to carry regarding social change.

Likewise, equally important is understanding epistemological approaches to use to inform research regarding Black women in leadership roles. Peters and Miles Nash (2021) found three approaches that appropriately reflected the experiences of Black women leaders: (a) Black feminist thought (BFT), (b) Afrocentric feminist epistemology, and (c) Endarkened feminist epistemology. For my study, I am informing my research design with EF epistemology, both of which center the experiences of Black women through self-identity, historical, spiritual, and shared knowledge through dialogue, and acknowledgement of intersection of oppression that are all essential towards activism for systemic change (Peters & Miles Nash, 2021).

Spiritual Wellness and Social Change

There is a history between social justice and spirituality, specifically within civil rights issues in the U.S. (Collins, 2009). Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was one leader whose ties with Christianity and the Black church was an avenue by which he shared his messages and efforts towards mobilizing social justice action. Black women hold prominent roles in upholding values of spirituality and justice within the Black community (Collins, 2009; Evans-Winters, 2019; Woods-Giscombé et al., 2016).

Evans-Winters (2019) described the socio-political perspective unique to Black women that closely links spirituality with efforts towards social justice that is passed on from stories of struggle pass along from family, individual lived experiences of

oppression, and witnessing (or experiencing) systemic oppression in educational settings and professional work environments. What is not known within counselor education specifically, is how the impact of Black women who identify with the stereotypical roles from related to their perceived role for fighting social injustice and its impact on wellness. Jones and Harris (2019) provided a different perspective on spirituality and cautioned observation of the negative role spirituality can have that is detrimental to Black women. Specifically, strong spirituality and religious beliefs could deter Black women from seeking help for mental health issues out of pressure to rely solely on divine healing.

Social change is an emerging focus of the counseling profession as counselor educators and supervisors are recognizing the impact of social justice (or injustices) and its impact on the mental health in the Black community (Domingue, 2015; Jangha et al., 2018). BW are not exempt from the impact of the social injustices and considering the ideologies that exist within the characteristics of the SBW. This is particularly helpful for my proposed research study related to the hypervigilance associated with ideologies that maintain and uphold systemic oppression within higher education settings and the implications for wellness when the Black woman has internalized beliefs in addition to the external experiences of gendered racism (Geyton et al., 2020; Grant & Ghee, 2015; Woods-Giscombé, 2010).

For instance, within the educational context, the experiences of Black students are further exacerbated by the pressure from individuals outside of Black culture and their reliance on Black students to initiate and lead cross-cultural experiences (White-Davis et

al, 2016). Particularly, there are implications within counselor education that indicates a commitment towards understanding intersecting cultural identities, experiences of power, privilege, and oppression that arise in educational settings, and discussion of ways to eradicate the unjust labor placed on Black students (Chan et al., 2018; Woods-Giscombé et al., 2016). Counselor educators and counseling professionals who work with Black women, especially should understand the role Black women have held in social justice progress and simultaneously how this role adds complexity to their experiences of gendered racism, historical trauma, and negotiating privileges while aspiring towards wellness.

Advocacy Burden. Counselor education professionals have a prominent positioning towards social change, representing aspects of the educational system as well as counseling best practices to promote wellness. The counselor education profession can benefit from research contributions that focus on how intersecting identities impact the experiences of Black women in academic settings, particularly in doctoral studies. More specifically, the field of counselor education represents a unique subculture of its own, both situated as a historically oppressive system (i.e., education) and as a profession with ethical standards that mandate cultural inclusivity and diversity in research, theory, and practice (Kaduvetoor, 2009; Lamar & Helm, 2017; Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018). Further, there is a need for additional research that explores the intersections of cultural identities and understanding academia as a culture in and of itself that stems from systemic forms of oppression. Understanding academia as a culture and its impact on

wellness for Black women with ISI may provide further insight for developing interventions, support networks, and other initiatives to promote positive social change.

It is imperative that more research is conducted that provides insight into how these experiences and perceived obligation to be leaders of social change can be internalized and specifically impact how Black women show up for themselves and others in CES doctoral programs. If these gaps in research are left unaddressed the CES profession could find itself contributing to the very same oppressive structures that produced these negative outcomes for Black women both during their doctoral programs, and afterwards, as they enter various workplaces (Foxx et al., 2018; Grant & Ghee, 2015; Peters & Miles Nash, 2021). Additionally, my autoethnography afforded me an opportunity to contribute to research that advocates for honoring diverse ways of knowing and conducting research. The results of my study could help inform all stakeholders of allied interventions to intercept, where possible, and facilitate a positive and anti-oppressive experience of meaningful academic presence for Black women in doctoral programs.

The Chapter Sankofa

For this chapter's summary, and aligned with the spiritual practice of Sankofa, it was important to reflect on, summarize, and sort through the aspects that are essential to forging ahead. In this chapter, I presented an overview of my literature review search strategy, explaining the difficulty in finding literature on my specific topic. More specifically, I searched the literature for studies and articles related to ISI, Black women in academic settings, particularly those related to leadership in CES field, and literature

that used Black feminist frameworks (Johnson, 2020; Shavers & Moore, 2019; Tevis et al., 2020). Finding articles that were related to each major aspect of my study were sparse, which was not altogether surprising, and further illuminated the need for more Afro-centric methodologies and practices within the CES field to add to the body of research and expand on ISI and how this may impact Black women's wellness during their programs of study. Additionally, in this chapter I presented an in-depth explanation of my conceptual framework, which intentionally reflects the interconnectedness between theory, methodology, and core concepts of my study.

In this chapter I highlighted research and literature that centered the experiences of Black women, intersectionality, and various responses to stereotypes about Black women. I explored the ISI for Black women and academic presence separately and together pertaining to aspects of wellness in each area (Kaduvettoor, 2009; Nelson et al., 2016; Watson-Singleton, 2017; Woods-Giscombé, 2010). I placed a specific focus on research about Black women's experiences in academic settings related to counseling profession. I framed wellness and unwellness within the context of academic experiences, ISI, and specific interconnectedness with leadership and advocacy roles assumed by Black women. I also introduced my conceptual framework and described the theoretical tenets from EF. My focus on narrative inquiry and more specifically, critical autoethnography was explored using existing literature using these methods.

I introduced Dillard's (2012) EF theoretical framework and I discussed additional theoretical, conceptual, and methodological influences from the literature that were influential in the choices I made within my research design. More specifically, Tevis et

al. (2020) and Overstreet (2019) contributed insights related to the use of critical autoethnography in qualitative research. Further, Domingue (2015) and Johnson (2020) were vital research articles that provided insight that supported my conceptual framework and the interlocking of core concepts explored and reported from the literature described in this chapter.

I discussed how controlling images can lead to ISI for Black women. Particularly, I provided a review of literature that defines the four common stereotypical tropes of Black women (Thomas et al., 2004), and noted the emphasis in my study focused on the interconnectedness between the former and emerging stereotypes (e.g., SBW, EBW), with specific emphasis on the situatedness of EBW identity in academia (Kaduvettoor, 2009). Further, research regarding the ISI was explored including sub-topics like self-silencing and social invisibility (Domingue, 2015; Geyton et al., 2020). Geyton et al.'s (2020) discussion of social invisibility introduced the impact of internalization in social settings. Lastly, I briefly provided a review of literature that connects Black women with social justice (Peters and Miles Nash, 2021) and explored how this relates to expectations that are featured in stereotypical roles (Kaduvettoor, 2009; Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018).

I provided a thorough synthesis and summary of my study's core concepts using existing literature, both empirical and theoretical, seminal and recent, and further discussed how this literature influenced my research design. Research has demonstrated that Black women encounter challenges that reinforce oppressive ISI (Geyton et al., 2020; Griffin, 2016; Nelson et al., 2016). Struggles with self-identity and perception of

scrutiny from the Black community can reinforce unrealistic perceptions of strength, obligation to fight for social justice, feelings of social invisibility or hypervisibility, and increase in stressors related to social identity (Geyton et al., 2020; Porter et al., 2020; Shaver & Moore, 2019). Black women who internalize these stereotypes are at risk for negative psychological and physiological impact unless supportive spaces are created to recall beliefs that are aligned with the complex self-identity of the Black woman (Collins, 2009; Dillard, 2012; Griffin, 2016). Additionally, wellness is closely related with specific identities, cultural and professional identity (Acosta, 2019; Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018; Woods-Giscombé, 2010). The ISI of Black women for my study focuses on the intersections of identity and thus representing academia as both a culture and a setting for this study.

Geyton et al. (2020) suggested implications for future research on stereotypical archetypes should “explore the experiences of Black women in religion and spirituality, romantic relationships, sexuality, education, various life stages, and within myriad contexts of family, friends, and professions (p. 10).” My study explored my experiences of internalization of stereotypes, spirituality, and education. Additionally, I provided an interconnected layered account of Black women from my family or my profession that have been involved in aspects of my life, particularly my education journey. My study fills the gap of understanding internalization of experiences of Black women which is often missing from research that does not capture the introspective journey of these internalized beliefs. Thus, my study contributes to the body of knowledge by providing in-depth insights for understanding experiences of conflicts between intersecting

identities, (un)wellness coping, and introspective views of ISI as a Black woman completing a doctoral degree. doctoral degree program.

In Chapter 3, I expounded on my research design and rationale of this critical autoethnography. Further, I provided a thorough explanation of the nature of the study, data collection methods, all aligned with my conceptual framework. I explained features present within my research study that are atypical, and yet very important within the context of anti-oppressive research methods and introduce my onto-epistemology which emphasizes ethical congruence throughout study design and guides my approach to my entire research study.

Chapter 3: The Method of (Re)Searching Self

For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. — Audre Lorde

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative critical autoethnography was to explore how I, as a Black woman, have navigated merging fragmented parts of myself to inform my professional identity as a counselor educator through negotiations of culturally situated experiences of race, gender, intersectionality, creativity, and spirituality while completing my doctoral degree. Writing as inquiry and analysis, as found in narrative inquiry and in ethnographic research, provided the methodological foundation for this critical autoethnography. More specifically, the culturally situated framework of EF, as outlined in my conceptual framework in Chapter 2, was integrated throughout my research design.

In this chapter, I discuss decisions that informed my research design for this critical autoethnography. I reintroduce my research questions and critical concepts of my study, including concepts related to my conceptual framework. I also identify the research tradition that I gleaned from and explain any adjustments I made. In Chapter 2, I described the conceptual framework used for my study; therefore, in this chapter, I will provide relevance and insight into how my conceptual framework informs the choices I made for the research design and rationale of this critical autoethnography. Specifically, I discuss the iterative process that informed my decisions for data collection, measures of rigor, trustworthiness, and qualitative measures of goodness. Additionally, I will provide rationale for other qualitative methodologies I considered but did not use.

Furthermore, in this chapter I will elaborate on research traditions that either align or misalign with my EF conceptual framework; I provide insight into the issues of spectatorship and the importance of the internal gaze. I argue that to truly understand the internalized experiences of Black women, their intersecting identities, and the experiences therewithin, I would be remiss to somehow take on a spectator's point of view. Instead, I leaned into vulnerability as both researcher and research subject to provide a meaningful vantage point into my life experiences alongside other Black women in my family.

Research Design and Rationale

The research problem that guided my study is centered around exploring the impact of internalized beliefs of racial and gendered stereotypes held by Black women and how this impacts experiences of professional identity development and (un)wellness for Black women pursuing doctoral degrees. The critical research question that guided this qualitative research study was: What are the experiences of (un)wellness of a Black woman while managing the intersections of ISI, academic presence, spirituality, and social (in)justice while earning a doctorate in a CES program? My research subquestion was: How do multiple generations of Black women define, describe, and endorse experiences of ISI through the lens of Black womanhood, spirituality, education, and social (in)justice? These research questions influenced decisions for the research design and reflected the need for a design that would allow for my positionality to be included in the methodology of inquiry and analysis. Additional considerations for my rationale to

use critical autoethnography included understanding research paradigms shifts, onto-epistemology, and alignment with my conceptual framework.

(Re)membering Critical Concepts and Terms

Several important terms and definitions undergirded this study. The conceptual framework housed several definitions, as outlined in Chapter 1, including the concept of EFs, which informed my methodological lens and was integrated throughout this study. Consistent with the EF conceptual framework, I used the reconfiguration of terms to reflect multiple meanings, such as (re)membering to represent remembering in the traditional sense and depicting a process of assembling fragmented parts together again.

The EF conceptual framework also includes the assumptions that African and African American cultures possess inherent knowledge from spiritual, cultural, and historical understandings that must be included in research aimed at social justice (Dillard, 2012). Additionally, EF supports ethnomethodology research, as in research that centers cultural aspects to frame its design (Dillard, 2012; Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). Therefore, I used variations of endarkened or endarkenment instead of enlightened or enlightenment, which is rooted in the intentionality of Afrocentric visibility within the EF framework.

The three major concepts central to this study included the internalized stereotypes of identity, (un)wellness, and academic presence. The internalized stereotypes of my experiences that I reported focused on the SBW, which encompasses aspects of the ABW and EBW tropes, which I introduced in Chapter 2. Specifically, regarding how these tropes are interconnected within academic spaces. These phenomena are understood

through EF frameworks that recognize the unique experiences of Black women, not as monolithic, but as those of individuals who also endure collective experiences of social injustice. The nuance of understanding social injustice was also essential to this study as it undergirded my quest to understand the ways in which these internalized stereotypes may have (mis)guided my academic pursuits—namely, my involvement in leadership and advocacy during my doctoral program.

There are implications for the role of research and leadership within the CES professional identity (Lamar & Helm, 2017). Thus, from this standpoint, I explored academic presence. Academia is both a site of my narratives and a cultural aspect explored for its own nuances that may or may not impact my experiences of wellness and unwellness while completing my doctoral program. In Chapter 2, I provided an overview of the literature related to ISIs and academic presence, with each concept illuminating an aspect of (un)wellness within existing literature. Similarly, my research design and methods will focus on these concepts and how they relate to one another.

Lastly, another key concept reviewed was Sankofa, which is a Ghanaian practice and symbol to represent looking back to retrieve what is necessary to move forward (Dillard, 2012). This concept, which is deeply ingrained within the EF paradigm, is an anchoring position of my research design as it emphasizes and supports my selected methodology of critical autoethnography. Within my study, I engaged frequently in the process of looking back toward memories through the use of artifacts, public records, and reflexive field notes (research journaling) related to my personal (re)collections; these were necessary to move toward positive social change.

An Endarkened Feminist Onto-Epistemology

Two important aspects I considered for my critical autoethnography were ontology (i.e., way of being in the world) and epistemology (i.e., way of knowing the world), referred to as *onto-epistemology*, that informed this study (Bhattacharya, 2017). According to Bhattacharya (2017), both ontology and epistemology are essential to the research process and inform how researchers approach qualitative research and ultimately how research data are interpreted. Integrated within my conceptual framework, my ontology is centered within beliefs that stem from my cultural identity that have steered my way of being. An example of my ontology from my conceptual framework was the incorporation of spirituality, which is also ingrained in EF theory, and how this influenced my exploration of my internalized motivations, way of being, and internalized narratives that describe my way of being. A common form of epistemology is constructionism, which Bhattacharya (2017) defines: “people construct their own meanings based on their experiences with the world” (p. 11).

Black feminist scholars have led the charge of recognizing how the women’s rights movement excluded the specific needs of minority women. This inspired me to find a theoretical lens that included the sovereignty of voice as a necessity for Black women in research (Davis & Brown, 2017; Pérez & Williams, 2014). EF houses within its literature an invitation to critical discourse surrounding the shared interests of marginalized groups and couples this with the truth-telling nature of friendships, which Dillard (2000, 2019) indicated are necessary for social change, particularly within higher education and academia. Therefore, an EF conceptual framework was central to the

research design and approach for my study as this lens assisted in taking a unique vantage point that centered the experiences of Black women as told by a Black woman to reinforce the sovereignty of voice that EF and Black feminist scholars encourage (Collins, 2009; Dillard, 2012). Dillard (2003) stated,

For me, an endarkened feminist epistemology is absolutely and necessarily a project of construction, of marshalling aspects of Black feminism and identity in strategically humanist ways that remember the spirit of Africa and seek reclamation, healing, transformation as the project of research. (p. 230)

Further, the EF framework has compelled me to consider how my story intertwines with the stories of those around me, provoking my own self-exploration and urge to find justice through the joy of resistance (Dillard, 2012). As such, EF was a fitting guiding light for my research design, highlighting the respect of other works while acknowledging the necessity for Black women to approach research through a nontraditional lens.

Although endarkened Black feminist scholars have promoted the study of Black women's storied experiences, the support of developing (and using) Black women-centric methodological frameworks is slowly passing gatekeeping thresholds across multiple disciplines (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021). Throughout this section, I explain what considerations informed my decision to conduct a critical autoethnography, including the onto-epistemology, an overview of autoethnography and critical autoethnography, participant selection and recruitment strategies, procedures for data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations. Most specifically, I focus on aspects

of my research design that may depart from traditional methodologies. I made departures that differ slightly from autoethnography as well, such as including additional participants.

Paradigm Shifts Toward Endarkened Critical Inquiry

Certain paradigm shifts within the field of research informed my research design and selection of the qualitative research method of autoethnography. Quantitative and qualitative research have long rivaled one another, with the presumption that one method may be better than the other (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2016) referred to that period as the *paradigm wars*. Over time, researchers have been able to identify benefits in each research method, which shifted toward a recognition of each having use depending on the type of research question asked.

Although some tension between these two methods remains, the acknowledgement of qualitative research allowed for less rigidity in certain aspects of research inquiry, such as freedom to explore diverse types of theoretical approaches within the context of qualitative study. Boylorn and Orbe (2021) wrote,

Critical praxis autoethnography can be beneficial because it legitimates first-person accounts of discrimination and difference and can therefore aid in the critique of colonialism, racism, sexism, nationalism, regionalism, xenophobia, and ethnocentrism. However, it can also simultaneously reveal commonality within the human experience, something that encourages connection as a means toward greater appreciation of how all individuals have fundamental needs for respect, dignity, and self-expression. (p. 10)

Ellis et al. (2011) commented on a time after the development of postmodernist research in which the exploration of issues within social science research was confronted with possibilities of research methods that valued diverse ways of how people make meaning of themselves and others. This critique among scholars also began to move away from ontologies and epistemologies that focused on absolute truth and, instead, recognized the complexity of storied accounts of people and phenomena being studied (Ellis et al., 2011).

EF addresses the need to center Black women's voices (and thus decenter whiteness), each proposing specific ways to focus on highlighting and amplifying Black women and their stories for the purposes of offering enlightenment to a variety of audiences who have not seen appropriate representation of Black women, as told by Black women (Dillard, 2012). Maseti (2018) wrote, "According to Lourens (2018), an autoethnography is useful in uncovering deeply concealed oppressions. It is also valuable in that it allows the personal/psychological to illuminate the political, while the political influences the psychological" (p. 345). More specifically, EF draws upon the reliance on embodied spiritual and cultural practices and how these are central to research that seeks to understand Black women (Dillard, 2012).

Endarkened feminists hold notions related to the sovereignty of Black women narrating their own stories, which are principles that guided my research purpose and informed my decisions about research design. Additionally, EF scholars and autoethnographers incorporate opportunities to invite others into witnessing the stories or

narratives in a way that stimulates discourse, and introspection from the observations of personal experiences across the intersections of culture (Alexander et al., 2012).

Breaking Tradition and (De)Selecting Methodology

Often absent in social science research is the insider's view of how internalized oppression manifests and replicates itself within systemic structures, like academia. However, if I revisit and (re)member experiences throughout my academic journey, there are messages about my cultural identity I have internalized that can provide a different type of insight into the phenomena regarding Black women found throughout literature. Therefore, due to the exploratory and introspective nature of this study, a qualitative design in which a researcher's experiences could be studied was most appropriate. Thus, certain qualitative methods of inquiry that support the embodied experiences remain and include heuristic inquiry (phenomenology), ethnography, and narrative inquiry.

Heuristic Inquiry

A heuristic phenomenological study had potential to allow the inclusion of my positionality and reflexivity as a researcher within the presentation of my research results (Thompson & Bridges, 2019). However, I decided phenomenology was not fitting because the aspects of my lived experiences were not a phenomenon to me and thus more appropriate for me to embrace and “articulate insider knowledge of cultural experience” (Adams et al., 2017, p. 3). Furthermore, the inclusion of multiple subjects as sources of data for my topic would have directly opposed my theoretical and conceptual framework, indicating that my story alone is not enough to show the phenomenon (ISI) and therefore would be incongruent with my conceptual framework and onto-epistemology.

Ethnography

For my study, I considered ethnography due to the iterative nature and immersive processes of research inquiry. More specifically, I considered ethnography due to its immersion into cultural experiences and particularly its emphasis on gaining access to specific sites. Due to the nature of my topic focusing on the internalized beliefs, and using myself as the primary subject, I have been immersed in my site my entire life and have been fortunate to have access to multiple cultural groups that are presented in my study. Ethnography also requires that the study itself is conducted over longer periods of time, so in the consideration of time, this method was not fitting. Additionally, I considered narrative inquiry as a form of writing to understand and know that is specific to my research topic and conceptual framework. The nature of understanding internalization of oppressive stereotypes involves much introspection and considering the limited time to engage in a traditional length of time for an ethnography, and considering that I possess these lived experiences, autoethnography was most appropriate for this study.

Narrative Inquiry and Critical Autoethnography

A narrative based qualitative research is best suited for this type of in-depth exploration of Black women during specific times in their life that speak towards the internal processes of identity, intersectionality, and wellness. The very nature of my research question and purpose uncovered the internalized beliefs of my experiences as a Black woman in a CES program, which make my proximity to the topic an asset for in-depth qualitative inquiry. According to Boylorn and Orbe (2016, 2021) critical

autoethnography is a method that introduced an intentionality in the telling of stories that display the interconnectedness of relationships, culture, and identity. Dillard et al. (2000) shared the use of oral histories and dialogue as tradition within African American communities. Further, the endarkened and critical approach to my qualitative study emboldened myself as the researcher to explore the intricacies of a single participant inquiry, in this case, a critical autoethnography.

Additionally, I considered other types of research designs carefully to assess the intentionality of my selected design. Further, considering the topic relates to Black women and uses Afro-centric theoretical frameworks, a type of narrative inquiry was indicated. Further, consideration of my own lived experiences with the research topic and identifying as a Black woman, a methodology that would allow for inclusion of my experiences, led to critical autoethnography.

While this critical autoethnography focused on my experiences, it was impossible to detach myself from others and as such I found ways to involve others in my story in an organic way, whether as readers, participants, or retelling to and with others to inform the CTs. In this way, I avoided one of the criticisms of autoethnography called navel gazing, in that I became actively aware of the intentionality to use my study to promote social change through dialogue that highlighted the interconnectedness between multiple communities.

Role of the Researcher

With consideration of positionality and reflexivity, I have embraced through acknowledgment the way in which my research was influenced by my social positioning,

namely my identity as a Black woman. More specifically, the identity as an SBW is centered in my cultural belief system. Additionally, I identify with the academic rigor involved in being a doctoral student in a counseling doctoral program. My intersecting identities within these sub cultural groupings fortify the intrinsic trustworthiness of this study. Further, my role as a researcher should provoke further engagement with this topic. Therefore, my role as a researcher and participant in this study was to share authentically how my lived experiences impact wellness and provide implications for how the results could inform future research on this topic.

Even so, it is important to address challenges, delimitations, and unique aspects of conducting an autoethnography to ensure the study has relatability beyond myself towards a larger social change context (Chang, 2016; Ellis et al., 2011; Holman Jones et al., 2016). Therefore, I made considerations that were intentional in increasing the engagement of others outside of myself for the purposes of this study. For instance, even though autoethnography is a standalone method, I added layered accounts to my narratives by bringing in perspectives from additional participants who I know personally that can offer their memories as a resource (in addition to my own), as well as their reactions elicited in the interviews (Chang, 2016; Holman Jones et al., 2016). Further, Ellis (2007) supported the inevitability that when we write stories about ourselves, we cannot avoid implicating others. As such, including additional participants is consistent within autoethnography when used to add more cultural insight into the personal accounts (Chang, 2016; Holman Jones et al., 2016).

Chang (2016) stated that interviews used in autoethnographies serve a separate purpose compared to other research methods, offering “contextual information to confirm, complement, or reject introspectively generated data” (p. 104). Some autoethnographers refer to these interviews with known participants as trusted conversations as their role is to inform the primary researcher’s narratives and denotes the familiarity between researcher and participant at a time prior to the research study (Ellis et al., 2004). Other autoethnographers may call these types of participants “informants” to represent the type of researcher-participant relationship. Adding additional participants, depending on the type of study, can contribute to the trustworthiness of the study as it adds valuable perspectives and insights to the narratives (Chang, 2016; Ellis, 2007; Holman Jones et al., 2016). I chose to use the term participants (or storytellers) as opposed to informants, as participants is more congruent with my conceptual framework and onto-epistemology.

Further, I embraced the intentionality of engaging with participants who are known to me as the researcher, as this is most appropriate for the cultural immersion necessary for the in-depth exploration of my research topic. Looking at my internalization of cultural aspects related to race, gender, professional identity, and beyond means that any layered accounts that can offer additional data would need to be as intimately involved as possible to provide depth. The use of participants who the researcher had established relationships with is a component familiar with ethnographers who tend to spend years within the field sites. Thus, in this case, the familiarity with my participants was a strength to my study and further aligned with critical autoethnography

as a way to bring the reader into the iterative and immersive process of conducting an autoethnography (Boylorn, 2016; Ellis, 2004).

Positionality

I am a Black woman who identifies strongly with the oppression experienced by those in my cultural groups of race and gender. I also strongly identify with the SBW trope that reinforces strength in lieu of wellness and caring for myself. This has surfaced in many ways in my life, but for the purposes of this study, it has situated me at the center of my research question and purpose. There have been times where I wanted to detach from my identity as a Black woman, and though it was not known to me then, my aspirations to pursue higher education (and where I have ventured to now) are related to internalized messages stemming from negative stereotypes about the intellectual abilities of Black people.

One of the most salient experiences that created unrest within me was illuminated for me in an experience I had in my first master's program where a professor told me that I wrote well 'for a Black student.' Regardless of her intentionality with the comment, all I heard was that her expectation was so low for Black students that a student who excelled was seen as an outlier. She felt the need to qualify my accomplishment (and my intellect) and ensure that I was aware that my appraisal had limitations based on aspects of my cultural identity.

From this experience, and others, I developed a deeper internal battle of avoiding failure at all costs, and often felt responsible for the weight of the limitations placed on my racial group; feeling that if I underperform academically, I elevated the voice from

those professors who think Black students are incapable of significant levels of achievement. These experiences being told via narrative will allow me to illuminate and expound upon the existing themes in literature and create an avenue towards critical conversations and social change to occur. The purpose, then, becomes clearer to endarken an understanding of how these experiences can be internalized by Black women and the impact on wellness while pursuing higher education.

My positionality was at the center of the study and my acknowledgment is critical to the overall purpose of the study. For this reason, my onto-epistemology is reflected throughout this chapter and informs decisions made to address concerns like bias, reflexivity, and positionality. Further, in this critical autoethnography, I embraced my bias of my own experiences and instead offer aspects of trustworthiness and considerations for my dual role throughout my research design.

Addressing Researcher Bias

Seeking social change can appear as separate to the role of the researcher, who often seeks to operate in a neutral role free from biases that would conflate their research interests and social advocacy. Yet, Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested that there are ways to engage in social justice advocacy in qualitative research by assuming a researcher perspective that honors the cultural experiences of those being interviewed. As a researcher, I have the desire to address the significant cultural gaps that exists in research that infringe upon social change using culturally situated research methodologies (Bhattacharya & Kim, 2020; Boylorn & Orbe, 2021; Collins et al., 2014; Dodd & Mizrahi, 2017).

Therefore, my study did not presume to eliminate bias, stemming from the belief that the researcher is very much centered in the way data is collected, analyzed, and interpreted (Bhattacharya & Kim, 2020; Ellis, 2004; Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Regardless of research design it would be culturally, ethically, and methodologically incongruent for me to use criteria aimed at addressing researcher bias as a measure of goodness for this autoethnography. Instead, I accounted for bias in my research design and used specific criteria aimed to align my research method within the endarkened feminist research paradigm and onto-epistemology that were much more fitting as measures of goodness for my critical autoethnography.

Methodology

My qualitative research study was a critical autoethnography in design and method. However, it is important to note that determining the research design and method for this study was an iterative process. As such, and due to the departures from commonly known qualitative research paradigms, I provide an overview of my methodological Sankofa. That is, I describe my process of retrieving necessary literature and seminal works (*looking back*) and provided a synopsis of those approaches necessary for my study (*bringing forth*) that take me from the paths of ethnography towards autoethnography and from positivist towards critical paradigms. In this section I provide an endarkened response to my recovery of traces from ethnography and autoethnography texts that are reflected in my decisions to move from positivist research paradigms towards a more critically endarkened methodological alignment. As such, several

theoretical and methodological books were used as references to inform decisions made that aided in endarkening my study.

By illuminating the history of these methods and describing my process for endarkening this method, I further justify the use of texts from Black feminists, endarkened feminists, and de/colonizing authors, who are often underrepresented in research, that I deemed essential and vital as research alignment for my critical autoethnography. Furthermore, I provide an in-depth description of my research method for data collection, recruitment, and data analysis. In the next section I will describe the foundational authors for ethnography and autoethnography who contributed to the mosaic of design that led me to critical autoethnography.

Ethnography

Ethnography is a postmodernist form of qualitative inquiry that has been used (or misused) for research studies within the social sciences (Hammersly, 2006; Richardson, 2000). Hammersly (2006) reported the origins of ethnography stemming from Western anthropology to offer critique of this method's use in social science research. One criticism that Western anthropologists noted was the use of ethnography without evidence of the researchers "living in the communities of the people being studied..." (p. 4). Hammersly noted that with this distinction, most studies using the term ethnography would not meet this criterion. Additionally, research from anthropology and sociology has defined ethnography by other features that separate it from other methods, like the use of various data collection methods, like genealogies, artifacts, and fieldwork that

takes place over extended periods of time (Bartholomew & Brown, 2022; Hammersly, 2006).

Richardson (2000) described the belief that ethnographers must make ethnography both “scientific... and literary...” (p. 253). Thus, ethnography as a method is tasked with balancing a deep immersion into a cultural experience that offers insights often with data gathered across lengthy spans of time, while engaging readers in an expressive and evocative way (Hammersly, 2006; Richardson, 2000). Particularly, the element of time often presents a challenge to ethnographers who may shorten their studies in order to complete them, therefore, limiting their ability to truly immerse in the culture they are studying. Hammersly (2006) described the limited amount of time in fieldwork as one of the most prominent aspects open for scrutiny for ethnographic research. which some critique as a detriment to.

For the context of my study, it was significant for me to explore the history of ethnography as part of the research trajectory that led me to critical autoethnography. Especially since preserving the historical richness of the study is a key aspect of ethnography (Hammersly, 2006), I found that (re)membering the origins of ethnography became essential for my study as I recognized the limitations that I would encounter. Namely, if I used ethnography, the aspect of engrossing in a field site and immersing in a cultural outside of my own would have presented a timeline challenge for completion. Thus, throughout my review of literature and development of my proposal, I landed on using myself as a subject to mitigate the limitation of time and addressed ethnographic immersion by focusing on my internalized experiences as a cultural insider that I

represented through various forms of data collection. These adjustments allowed me to keep the essence behind ethnography while also leading me to consider autoethnography.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography as a method of qualitative inquiry is broadly nestled under narrative inquiry and relies on reflexive practices used in qualitative research (Ellis et al., 2011; Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Additionally, autoethnography allows researcher positionality and reflexivity to be central to the process of research (Bhattacharya, 2017; Ellis et al., 2011; Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Adams et al. (2017) defined autoethnography as a type of research to “systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)” (p. 1).

Particularly, autoethnography has piqued interest in social science research due to its ability to present research in analytical and evocative ways (Chang, 2016; Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones et al., 2016). Autoethnography provides an outlet for social research where the researcher’s positionality could potentially inform understanding of the complexity of sociopolitical and social justice-oriented needs of marginalized communities (Tomaselli et al., 2013). Further, Tomaselli et al. (2016) purported that the use of autoethnography, when used to explore how the personal impacts the political, contributes to scholarship and research that desires to detach from colonized methods of inquiry. Further, autoethnography is a type of qualitative approach that uses strategies from literature and scientific methods to inform its research design. Autoethnographers suggest that autoethnographies are usually evocative or analytical in nature (Chang, 2016; Ellis et al., 2011; Holman Jones et al., 2016).

Critical Autoethnography

Critical autoethnography, which I introduced in Chapter 2, is an approach and methodological design that was most appropriate for my study. Boylorn and Orbe (2016) defined autoethnography as “cultural analysis through personal narrative” (p. 17). Further, they described the importance of using a critical lens for the development of narratives to create what they call a critical autoethnography. Further, Boylorn and Orbe (2021) describe critical autoethnography as a methodology that can “make sense of how identity, culture, and relationships are interconnected” (p. 11).

More specifically, critical autoethnography supports tenets from EF and subsequently has created a space for people from marginalized communities to express and challenge systemic oppressions like gendered racism, and also a calling in of allied support to work in tandem towards resolutions for all (Durham, 2021). Further, the fusion of both evocative and analytical stances supports that my autoethnography is more aligned with Sughrua’s (2019) description of critical qualitative inquiry. Sughrua referred to genres of autoethnography that address gendered racism while challenging dominated ways of knowing as *Blackgirl* autoethnographies. Blackgirl autoethnography developed by Robin Boylorn accounted for the ways in which both race and gender are experienced together and is represented by joining the words Black and girl together without space when written and spoken (Boylorn, 2016).

I have been fortunate to engage in mentorship with researchers like Dr. Bhattacharya who wrote several autoethnographic narratives describing her experience as a woman of color in academic spaces, and who attributes her perseverance and endurance

to an embodied connectedness to cultural ways of knowing (personal communication, K. Bhattacharya, January 2021). It is from her research and contemplative practices introduced to me during mentorship that I found guidance in discovering a type of autoethnography that speaks to the issues present within academic spaces for Black women. My quest led me to explore culturally situated approaches to research that would align with my onto-epistemology and conceptual framework.

Subsequently, Griffin's (2012) development of Black Feminist Autoethnography provided additional insight "...fusing Black feminist thought and autoethnography together necessitates an explicit commitment to move from merely looking at life toward a standpoint rooted in interrogation, resistance, and praxis" (p. 143). I found that using a Black feminist informed approach to autoethnography situated my research within my conceptual and theoretical framework as well. Further, my EF conceptual framework guided my decisions related to using critical autoethnography as a standalone method of qualitative study that emboldens the researcher to explore the intricacies of a single participant narrative inquiry, in this case, my autoethnography. EF also welcomes the retelling of stories among trusted individuals or in community with others. Dillard's (2012) EF within the transnational methodological framework adds significant insight into how important alignment between method, design, theory, and practice of research interconnect.

Minnett et al. (2019) used a Black feminism framework for a collective autoethnography where three doctoral students and researchers used Griffin's (2012) Black feminist autoethnography lens to depict the ability of Black women who stand

within various intersections of identity, “navigate both worlds – that of the oppressor and that of the oppressed...to divide subjective and objective realities...” (p. 217). Using storytelling gathered from informal meetings with one another, the researchers used a Black feminist framework to identify criteria for data analysis. I am particularly interested in the collaborative nature of discussing the research in an informal way to facilitate meaningful discourse related to culture, identity, and wellness.

One way I engaged additional participants was through a form of semistructured interviews which I call *storyteller interviews*. I modeled these conversations much like sister circles or wisdom whispers, which are informal, conversational spaces where Black women share collective wisdom, guidance, and support (Collins, 2009; Griffin, 2012; McClish, 2018; Minnett et al., 2019). For the purposes of this research study, I selected three storytellers who had information relevant to my education history and who are members of my mother’s side of the family to deepen the intergenerational context of my story. The use of storytelling and collective witnessing within storytelling have long since been used historically, though only more recent within the past decade been explored within qualitative research (Alexander et al., 2012; Chawla & Rodriguez, 2008; Dillard et al., 2000; Kim, 2015).

Performative storytelling and collective witnessing are also practices stemming from indigenous and culturally situated methodologies that I considered for aspects of my study with elements of performative storytelling as a part of my research process for data collection (Chawla & Rodriguez, 2008; Joseph, 2008; Kim, 2015). My reflexive method of engaging with my stories focused on how they endarken my academic trajectory.

When I considered the inclusion of additional storytellers, the aspect of involving ancestral and cultural knowledge bearers was most appropriate. Thus, my process of data collection involved an iterative and tiered approach of writing narratives, interviewing storytellers, rewriting narratives, and then member checking where my storytellers had an opportunity to review their interview transcripts. Later in this chapter I will describe procedures I engaged in throughout my autoethnographic narrative writing and storytelling process that also informed my interaction with participants.

My critical autoethnography is evocative and analytical. Analytical because I analyze the collected data to report themes between my experiences and current research. Additionally, my study is evocative as I do not believe there is a way to share experiences from my own life without evoking emotions and insights into the implications of ISI, the impact of oppressive systems that exist in academia, and each aspects' impact on wellness. It is with both analytical and evocative motivation that I conducted this study to stir into critical dialogue that will move counselor education towards positive social change. Part of this necessary dialogue is the ever present need to highlight Black women's voices in research and advocacy work.

Data Sources

Data sources for my qualitative method consisted of a combination of personal (re)collections, artifacts, and storyteller interviews that each combined to inform the CTs. More specifically, I explored the experiences of myself as a Black woman in a doctoral counseling program with a focus on the intersectionality of cultural and professional identities using my own experiences as a backdrop to the ISI, like EBW. I shared my

experiences that supported existing themes from literature as a member of this cultural group as well as shared the unique experiences that occurred at the intersection of my CES professional identity (Adams et al., 2015; Chang, 2016; Ellis, 2004). Readers are encouraged to take my results and critically analyze its relevance to current literature to further discourse regarding the culturally situated intersections of race, spirituality, gender, and holistic wellness and if so desired, disseminate these results in their respective fields for further exploration of the topic.

In addition to my CTs, I included data from participants using a semistructured interview methods to guide conversations about experiences related to my research questions (Adams et al., 2015). More specifically, I explored the choice of the specific type of narrative inquiry needed to capture the essence of my endarkened framework that accurately represent the intersections of identity.

Each critical tale I used in this study expounded on the concepts I identified in my conceptual framework detailed in Chapter 2. Though parts of my CTs include biographical content for context, each story included was relevant to the concepts at the center of this study. Further, my tales and characters displayed internalized narratives about identity that emphasized the integration between theoretical, conceptual, and the key concepts that I explored further throughout this study.

To recruit additional participants, I used purposive and convenience recruitment strategies to gain participation from known individuals who have interacted in a significant way with any of my intersecting identities, and particularly Black women on my mother's side of the family. These participants helped me with memory recall,

provided a wider viewpoint of my topics, and assisted with collective insight, and consideration for how generations of Black women are intertwined within my story. Thus, the use of additional storyteller participants served to answer my research sub-question which invites critical discourse regarding my topic to expand the accessibility of my study.

Engaging Others and Self

I used trusted conversations with storytellers, modeled after Minnett et al.'s (2019) informal interview style, where I met with my participants to discuss a particular time period referred to in my written personal accounts and to gain general insight on their definitions of my key concepts. Focusing on interviewing Black women on my mother's side of the family was also intentional as it interconnected my cultural, spiritual, and academic identity through the eyes of other Black women in my family lineage to provide rich data to my overarching themes of identity formation. However, one difference from Minnett's (2019) study and mine is that in my study, my storytellers were not asked to write their own narratives or conduct any other labor in addition to the informal interview and debriefing sessions. Their efforts were intertwined within my personal accounts to create the CTs used for analysis.

The CTs remained autoethnographic in nature and thus I did not ask my storytellers to expose themselves as intimately in the same manner that I exposed myself. Moreover, the primary role of the storytellers was a type of expansion to the collected data offering insight from varying cultural identities through an intersectional and generational lens. Ellis (2007) discussed the importance of understanding that as

autoethnographers, our personal narratives cannot be separated from the narratives of others. Endarkened feminists would agree that as autoethnographers tell their own story, they cannot escape how their stories are intertwined with the story of others (C. Dillard, personal communication, January 24, 2022). As such, the use of participants in an autoethnography helped provide a layer of accountability to my recollection as well as offer opportunity to engage layered cultural contexts (i.e., intergenerational) with additional perspectives for data analysis (Holman Jones et al., 2016).

Dillard (2019) spoke of the criticality of intentional friendship or trusted conversations within cultures and cross culturally. Therefore, even though I have steered away from methods of inquiry that solicit and present multiple participant narratives to describe cultural phenomena, there remained an avenue to involve additional storytellers for my narratives in a meaningful way that I explored in hopes of informing future research and creating an avenue for discussion. Therefore, with careful consideration in the inclusion of additional participants, I deferred to Dillard's (2012) text for guidance on including others in *mesearch* (or research about self).

EF embraces bell hooks' (1994) concept of the basic interdependency of life which recognizes the impact the community and larger society has on the individual, and regardless of class, race, gender, and numerous intersecting identities, we will all collide with one another throughout our lives (hooks, 1994 as cited by Dillard, 2012). Thus, my choices related to adding at least one other storyteller to this critical autoethnography was aimed towards integration of multiple vantage points from my mother's side of the family that enriched my procedures for data collection and analysis and remained congruent with

my study design, purpose, and conceptual lens. In the next section, I expound on my role as participant and the rationale for including additional storytellers in a way that is aligned with critical autoethnography and my EF onto-epistemology.

Participants as Storytellers

In this study, I analyzed stories from myself as the researcher and incorporated the perspectives of additional participants, whom I interchangeably refer to as *storytellers*, for an autoethnography to gain a deeper understanding of the topic within context of my internalized experiences as a Black woman. More specifically, I explored my experiences as a Black woman in a doctoral counseling program with a focus on the intersecting identities, internalized stereotypes of identity (e.g., EBW), and (un)wellness. I was both researcher and researched, making myself the primary participant of this study.

To address the research questions in this qualitative study, the specific research design included construction of various tales composed of personal accounts of experiences, archival artifacts, and ethnographic data from trusted conversations with storytellers who are either involved with parts of my lived experiences, or the lived experiences of my mother's side of family (Adams et al., 2015; Bhattacharya, 2017; Ellis, 2004). I hosted these trusted conversations using a secure virtual teleconference platform to accommodate for my storyteller's comfort and for convenience in consideration of safety during the ongoing pandemic.

As discussed earlier, due to the nature of this autoethnography exploring the intersections of different cultural settings, the use of additional storytellers was beneficial and enriching to the iterative process of identifying themes and layering the personal

narrative accounts I wrote. These additional storytellers added to my understanding and analysis of specific intersections of identity within my mother's side of the family and assisted in curating the use of a type of member checking that was most conducive with my iterative data collection and analysis process as seen in autoethnographic research (Chang, 2016; Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones et al., 2016).

The last type of participant I used in this study were fictional, composite characters developed to represent figures and critical depictions of systemic structures, people, and settings necessary to present the findings and as bell hooks (1989) described as “talk[ing] back” at oppressive systems (Minnett et al., 2019, p. 217). This last category of participants is included to provide clarity and distinction from the other types of participants. These compositive characters serve the role of protecting identity of those who may represent undesirable depictions of people within my narratives but that are critical to the discourse surrounding my topic (Ellis, 2004).

Layered Accounts in Critical Tales

When participants are added to autoethnographic research, the purpose for the addition must be clear and aligned with the research purpose (personal communication, K. Bhattacharya, January 2021). I considered the usefulness of adding participants in a way that would be enriching and fit within my conceptual and methodological frameworks. Thus, my research storytellers added to the CTs in an iterative process that layered my personal (re)collections. I used semistructured interview questions with the storytellers, adding in their perspectives as relevant to the larger critical narrative. For generational context, the layered accounts within the CTs illuminated cultural and

historical factors from a generational perspective that I alone cannot produce. I followed procedures to obtain participant consent to record these trusted conversations which allowed me to use the collected data in my analysis.

For my study I used a combination of these trusted conversation interviews and member checking debriefing sessions with each storytelling participant. The nature of interviewing trusted and known individuals is consistent with autoethnographic research and aligned with my conceptual framework. Ellis (2004) used these types of conversations to interview students whom she planned to include in her book about autoethnography. While the setting of the narrative was largely fictional, Ellis' (2004) inclusion of participants was to add to the depth of the characters based on their actual interactions with one another. Ellis (2004) then considered their feedback in the rewrites or justified why a decision was kept in lieu of the feedback. The entire process becomes transparent and flexible, which was what I am aimed for in my study. Therefore, in addition to creating composite characters, I interviewed additional research storytellers who have witnessed aspects of my experiences and who were willing and able to add insight into the themes I explored in this study.

The use of storytellers is a method often used in (auto)ethnographic research, and each storytellers' role is consistent with a type of peer debriefing and trusted conversation-style informal interview where they each contribute knowledge, wisdom, and insight that will inform my written narratives (Ellis, 2004, 2007; Holman Jones et al., 2016). Particularly, for my study, the storytellers helped me (re)member and provide additional cultural and intergenerational insights that intersect with aspects of my life or

my mother's side of family as it pertains to social justice advocacy, education, spirituality, and identity as Black women. Further, I determined the number of additional storyteller interviews based on specific need for additional information which developed throughout the iterative data collection process.

Recruitment Methods

The type of recruitment methods used in research is essential and is especially crucial to the overall cohesion of my dissertation study (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). My study consisted of two types of participants, which included myself as researcher and participant and two storytellers. The primary source of data for my study came from my personal accounts and archival data. Therefore, in this critical autoethnography I served in the role of primary storyteller (participant) and researcher. Each type of participant served a specific role related to data collection, analysis, and representation of findings.

Based on principles of practices consistent within ethnographic and autoethnographic research, I used both purposive and convenience strategies to recruit my storytellers (Esposito & Venus-Winters, 2021; Etikan et al., 2016). These approaches permitted me to seek storytellers who were most appropriate to inform my research study with firsthand knowledge and interactions with me and my mother's side of the family which supplemented reliance on memory. I planned to accommodate between one to ten storytellers for my study, and ultimately had two storytellers that contributed to my data collection. For the trusted conversations with the storytellers, I used a semistructured interview protocol using eight guiding questions. These storytellers had followed up with me to schedule a member check session where they checked their contributions for

accuracy, and I made subsequent corrections based on their feedback. The interview protocol I used for this study is shown in Appendix B.

I used various forms of recruiting participants, both formal and informal. Since the storytellers are known to me, I reached directly via phone and email contact with my prospective storytellers to set up a time to informally discuss my research and answer any questions. After these informal conversations, and with expressed interest to move forward I would then send each storyteller a formal email request with written information about my study and what their role would be should they choose to participate, and instructions for the process of providing informed consent. Following the interview process and member checking session, all storytellers officially exited my study as their commitment and expectations were completed at that time.

Data Collection

My primary sources of data for this study were informed by my personal accounts, which I call personal (re)collections, from my experiences related to education occurring throughout my childhood and culturally situated around the timeline markings of pivotal points throughout my doctoral journey. More specifically, the experiences in which my identities conflicted with one another was my focus for the CTs. I created these CTs to display specific aspects of my identity development and the impact of internal pressures on performing as an *Academic* or performing as a *Christian* or performing *Black Femininity* (or *Black womanhood*). I shared the inner workings of my identity as a Black Christian woman in a CES doctoral program in the wake of larger societal injustices like the death of Breonna Taylor and described how the conflict within each of

the three identities intertwine with the subcultures around me, namely academia as a subculture, where each of these identities exist in certain ways.

According to Chang (2016), a method within autoethnography to increase the trustworthiness and triangulation of data is the inclusion of artifacts. Therefore, I gathered and collected data from reflexive research journal entries, personal communications, social media posts, memos, and other pertinent archival data from specific points of time that correlate with my narratives and maternal, historical artifacts that supplemented my research purpose. Additionally, I addressed the intergenerational context of my experiences by including additional storytellers from my mother's side of the family using trusted conversations interviews that layered the CTs. In Table 1, I described the data sources and approximate number of pages estimated for each source.

Setting

There was an overlay of various settings and sites central to my study. The primary setting of my study revolved around my cultural identity as a Black woman rooted in childhood experiences that I described using personal (re)collections as told in the CTs. Additionally, academia was representative of another cultural setting and represented its own culture of professionalism. Secondly, the setting of my narratives varied between settings in the autobiographical context of my personal (re)collections and fictional settings used for the CTs. Lastly, Zoom technology was the method I used to collect the interview data from the storytellers.

The nature of this critical autoethnography centered the exploration of my intersecting identities as a Black woman as representative of the setting of my life

experiences and used memory as the primary site of inquiry. As described in Chapter 2, the CTs were written in a way to highlight the dialogue and experiences without relaying identifying information of any particular person or place. The artifacts that I used to support the CTs were supplemental and presented information relevant to the settings and stories. I also used an amalgam of biblical and historical figures as well as people from my life to develop the fictional characters that supported the storying of my experiences.

My story timeline occurred across past and immediate present timelines interwoven into the real and fictional settings. As such, the main form of writing style used was literary present tense. The interconnectedness of sites is important for my study. Primarily, using memory and context added from additional participants, my life experiences as a Black woman throughout my academic studies, specifically as a doctoral student, was the primary site of data. Additionally, the site of inquiry also represented time frames for the narratives that (re)present different points of time on my doctoral journey (e.g., beginning of my program; completing coursework; dissertation phase).

Procedures

The CTs used in this study described my personal (re)collections focused on experiences with an approximated timeline from 2017 to 2021, which is representative of the start of my doctoral program until the process of dissertation. To inform the tales, I retold and shared these personal (re)collections with a trusted individual (e.g., academic wellness mentor) or via voice recording of myself telling the story, which I later transcribed. I gathered relevant artifacts like photos, email communications, social media posts, voice memos, zoom private chats, and other archival data (i.e., reflexive research

memos) within my possession. I then recruited and interviewed storytellers which added depth to my process of meaning-making and (re)membering that informed the creation of the CTs.

My procedure for collecting data included an iterative and intuitive process of writing personal (re)collections, gathering relevant artifacts including reflexive journal entries, and conducting semistructured trusted conversation interviews. These data sources combined to inform the creation of the CTs that I presented in this study. The iterative process consisted of the following steps: (a) write personal (re)collections, (b) gather artifacts related to personal (re)collections, (c) recruit storytellers, (d) interview storytellers, (e) analyze Part I of storyteller interviews, (f) write and analyze critical tales, (g) storyteller member-checking sessions, and (h) revise and analyze critical tales.

Writing the Critical Tales

I gathered relevant artifacts like photos, email communications, social media posts, voice memos, Zoom private chats, and other archival data (i.e., reflexive research memos) within my possession. The artifacts that I used after filtering through the collection ranged from December 2019 through December 2021. Particularly, for the generational context, I included specific childhood memories as early as around 7 years old until early adulthood as relevant to the scope of my study. The archival data that was gathered related to the CTs were added for context where relevant and are listed in the List of Figures in the Table of Contents. I then recruited and interviewed storytellers, which added depth to my process of meaning-making and (re)membering that informed the creation of the CTs.

Voicing the Critical Tales

Much of my process of storying and storytelling occurred through conversations I had with others where I took notes or journaled directly after for recounting and recollecting these stories. I also engaged in voicing my narratives using audio technology like the dictation feature in Microsoft Word. I would then voice record the retelling along with the dictation feature to hear my voice on the playback. Next, I edited and revised the dictation to include the most relevant aspects of each tale. This part of the process was intuitive and occurred naturally through the data collection and was recorded in my research journal as an actual method to use throughout the writing and voicing of the CTs. Dillard et al. (2000) commented on the use of spiritual insights in African American communities that are “conveyed orally in the form of proverbs, anecdotes, poetry, story, song, and dialogue” (p. 452). This process varied, but most typically, I would sit at my computer, open a Word document, turn on the dictation, and start summarizing the story I wanted to tell. I used the dictation feature in Microsoft Word to tell the story aloud quite literally.

Figure 2

Excerpt from Critical Tale “Missing the Mark”

...That **this was unacceptable** and that I would not be able to recover. Thoughts about overwhelming amount of student loan debt. The **overwhelming** amount of pressure to do well so I could finish and needing the finances to give me support – to be able to support myself – to finish the degree. Every choice felt so obsolete in this moment. It felt like **I had missed the mark** in such a huge way. But what was the most gripping in all the sea of thoughts passing through – was **this thought that flooded my mind of – you won't even make it to the table**. So, it wasn't so much about if I had applied again and didn't get it. At the core I think I knew that's a possibility this is a competitive fellowship, but it was the fact that I could make a mistake that wouldn't even get me on the table to be considered. **THAT felt unforgivable to me.**

Then, after one iteration of dictation, I would remain in the document with dictation on, close my eyes, and turn on the audio recording feature on my phone, and retell the story again with my eyes closed. This process was completed for Steps e and f as noted on page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Figure 3

Audio Dictation Excerpt from Critical Tale “Missing the Mark”



The audio dictation on my phone helped me relisten to moments that I conveyed through my retelling that I wanted to recapture once I revised the written version. For instance, I noticed through the varying iterations of telling and retelling, I began to speak more freely with my eyes closed, which allowed me to place myself back in certain experiences. Additionally, the dictation feature helped to capture the truest spoken form of the story, to be edited later for clarity.

Hearing my voice was also necessary to telling the truest version of my personal (re)collections needed to craft the CTs. Throughout my presentation of the CTs, the reader will witness me move through the fictional dialogue represented by the setting of therapy, inclusion of artifact images, memos, and journal entries, and through memory recall that is interwoven throughout the tales. The reader is also going to read stories of my mother and grandmother as it related to the context of my study. In Figure 2, I included an excerpt of a critical tale I recorded that demonstrates my use of dictation. Figure 3 is a QR code that links to an audio clip where you can hear a portion of me

retelling a part of a critical tale that captures the emotional aspect of retelling that were harder to convey when I read and revised written drafts of the tales.

Guiding Probes for Storyteller Interviews

I used eight guiding probes as questions with my storytellers influenced from EF and questions consistent with qualitative interviewing. These guiding probes were used to engage storytellers throughout the interview. A complete list questions is found in Appendix B. Figure 4 provides an example of the guiding questions I asked in the storyteller interviews.

Figure 4

Example of Guiding Probe Questions

How do you define spirituality?	<i>Guiding Probe</i> Does spirituality have a role in social justice advocacy?
	<i>Guiding Probe</i> What, if any, is the connection between spirituality and education?
	<i>Guiding Probe</i> What about spirituality's relationship with wellness? Unwellness?

Furthermore, Dillard (2012) discussed specific considerations for endarkened feminists in each aspect of the research process. Particularly, Dillard (2012) offered a guide of questions that reflect endarkened transnational feminists' approach to research and that "... have the potential to shape a more reverent and sacred approach to inquiry that transcends our differences, our feminisms, and our lives" (p. 77).

Similarly, I used several of Dillard's (2012) proposed questions to guide the construction of my CTs and ultimately used these guiding questions to inform my data collection and data analysis processes. Specifically, there are categories of questions that

I used throughout my process, and perhaps most importantly, the questions that guided my data analysis. Dillard (2012) mentioned four categories with guided questions to consider with EF research: (a) On the meaning of African womanhood; (b) On the sacred nature of experience; (c) On recognizing African community and landscapes; and (d) On engaging body, mind, and spirit (p. 78-79). More specifically, below are several of the guiding questions from Dillard's (2012) EF methodology that helped me create inclusion and exclusionary criteria for the CTs during data collection and analysis:

- Which story will I tell and from what time period of “African womanhood?”
- How have I sought knowledge at a level of intimacy and wholeness, at the level of the senses, the sensual, and the spiritual? (p. 78-79)

Additionally, I asked the following questions during data analysis, also adapted from Dillard (2012, pp. 78-79) to guide my interpretations and integration of the storyteller interviews with my study's CTs:

- In what ways does the story I'm hearing (or the text I'm reading) map on to my experience and knowings? In what ways is it different?
- What does their story mean to me and what emotions/memories does it evoke?
How do my emotions mediate (or distort) their intended meaning?

Appendix A lists my data inventory plan with the estimated ranges of each data source. This was particularly helpful to display for autoethnographic studies to paint a picture of the different types of data sources and the amount of data that each could produce. The ranges became a part of the back-and-forth process of sorting through each data source to extract the most salient and information rich content for the CTs.

Data Analysis Plan

I used various coding processes to analyze the data for this autoethnography, selecting processes most appropriate for the types of data to provide an in-depth critique. I used open coding methods that included process coding and in vivo coding for my CTs and interview data (Kim, 2015; Saldaña, 2013). Additionally, I used a priori coding (Saldaña, 2013) from my theoretical framework to denote codes derived from existing literature. Next, I employed a critical framework analysis to interpret the codes to answer my research questions (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021; Saldaña, 2013). Finally, I moved from coding to analysis where I used endarkened narrative analysis with an intersectional lens to establish categories and themes in consideration of how the various data sources were interconnected with my study's concepts and theoretical framework (Bhattacharya, 2017; Boylorn & Orbe, 2016, 2021; Ellis, 2004).

According to Chang (2016), the movement back and forth from the internal gaze onto the interactions with others is a process that is inherent to the autoethnographic process. This process of navigating the various data sources and interpreting within the cultural context was continuous throughout data analysis and interpretation. Furthermore, it was important that my collected data be interpreted through the lens of my EF conceptual framework, therefore I used narrative analysis that incorporates multiple lens of intersectionality, criticality, and feminism to synthesize my data both substantively, conceptually, and theoretically (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021; Saldaña, 2013).

Another consideration was the use of software for data analysis. Esposito and Evans-Winters (2021) encourage the use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis

systems (CAQDAS) to assist with analyzing and storing the data. Based on the volume of data I collected, I used MAXQDA for CAQDAS as it was the most appropriate software program to fit my needs.

Writing as Analysis

For my CTs, I used literary creative nonfiction as method of storytelling to demonstrate the interactions and intersections between my study's primary constructs using storytelling about my (re)collection of events throughout my academic journey (Kim, 2016). I introduced a central character in my narrative, my grandmother, in the Prologue of the *Critical Tales Series* as a foundation to depict the intricacies of my endarkened feminist conceptual framework. My grandmother represents a manifestation of my conceptual framework, as a critical figure in teaching, showing, and loving me in a way that modeled the interconnectedness of my identity as a Black woman, a spiritual woman, and an individual who matters – regardless of social location.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers should adhere to standards of practice that help align the research question with research design while also managing a flexibility with alignment of the research focus (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Even so, there can be challenges to find a medium between flexibility and rigor. There are several strategies that can help increase the trustworthiness of a research study. For example, treatment of data is an aspect of conducting ethical research that can increase the trustworthiness of a study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For my study I recognized the importance of viewing my

interviewee as an integral part of my research study and thus considered the ethics of including participants in autoethnography (Ellis, 2004).

Qualitative researchers also understand that the assessment of research quality or goodness is associated with how well-aligned the researcher's paradigmatic and onto-epistemological frameworks are with their design (Morrow, 2005). As such, each element included in my study design was intentional and balanced between the ethics and overall quality of the study. In this next section I describe how aspects of my study align with an endarkened view of trustworthiness for qualitative research, including considerations I made for my study based on measures of goodness, rigor, and ethics.

Measures of Goodness

When I considered the numerous ways of conducting autoethnography, it was important for me to clarify the decisions that I made based on foundational sources and their exertions of measures of goodness. For instance, I explored certain areas of my study that depart from well-known qualitative measurements of quality to determine the perceived impact to my overall study. Similar to discussions of rigor and trustworthiness, my discussion of qualitative measures of goodness elaborates on both traditional considerations coupled with justification for my decisions for this study that were guided by my onto-epistemology. Tracy (2010) discussed eight areas of goodness for qualitative research. These areas of goodness reflect the following: worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethical, and meaningful coherence. In the following sections I remark on credibility (and sincerity), transferability (or resonance), dependability (or meaningful coherence), and confirmability (or

significant contribution) within the context of my study. Further, I elaborate on Tracy's (2010) eight areas of goodness and discuss my selection of specific wording that fits my study design.

Credibility and Sincerity

There are several essential aspects of qualitative research design that address credibility. Selection of participants, triangulation, and coding methods are all strategies researchers use to increase credibility (Babb et al., 2017; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). More specifically, I used various data sources, like personal (re)collections, archival data, and interviews for triangulation to inform my development of the CTs. Additionally, while qualitative researchers have embraced terminology like reflexivity and positionality that account for the researchers' role in their research, my critical autoethnography considered these notions further in the centrality of each critical narrative which strengthens the credibility for this type of research method (Roulston & Shelton, 2015).

Sincerity, which is a concept in close proximity to credibility, is also important to the goodness of a qualitative research study (Tracy, 2010). Sincerity considers components of "self-reflexivity, vulnerability, honesty, transparency, and data auditing" as essential parts of ethical and genuine research (Tracy, 2010, p. 841). More specifically, data auditing research that involves the self requires the researcher to engage in transparent tracking of decisions made throughout the process to provide an account for the research that is produced and presented (Tracy, 2010). Further, for the purpose of this study, my personal (re)collections depicted in the CTs were the most vulnerable and credible when considering my ability to submerge myself introspectively into my

internalization of stereotypes to bring forth the most salient tales for transferability of findings. Additionally, I used member checking for interpretation accuracy to support the storyteller interviews I conducted. The use of member checking also enhanced transparency as this method provided opportunities for each storyteller to review information collected from their interview for accuracy and interpretation after I transcribed and interpreted the data.

Transferability and Resonance

Transferability can increase trust in a research study in that it supports the belief that the data collected can be useful in broader contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). When readers believe the results of a study translate to their experiences, they may feel inspired towards action in their own lives (Tracy, 2010). In this way, transferability is important as a means towards social change actions. Tracy (2010) purported that resonance can also result in transferable and generalizable findings, but additionally is used to describe the “aesthetic, evocative representation” of a study (p. 840). Further, researchers who use resonance to describe their study recognized that each qualitative study will be unique in how it reaches this measure and as such focus their efforts on aesthetic merit and transferability (Tracy, 2010).

In my study, the concepts I explored resonate in several ways related to larger cultural contexts, particularly related to discourse on privilege, oppression, institutional power, and gendered racism. One contextual consideration is related to the focus on my experiences as a Black woman and implications about (un)wellness practices during doctoral studies. Other central concepts that I explored interrogate stereotypic trope

messages that are internalized that have an impact on how culture and institutional power can influence and impact experiences of individuals from marginalized populations on the larger context of the collision of socioeconomical engagement in social justice issues.

All the contexts that I explored in my study provide implications for multiply marginalized communities' experiences within political social justice efforts housed within academia which arguably is often at the center of religious and political tensions. With resonance, my aim is towards transferability that occur naturally within the representation of the data and that are found throughout the narrative analysis without sacrificing aspects of my endarkened framework (Tracy, 2010).

Dependability

Researchers often aim to demonstrate that their research results are dependable. Regarding participant selection, as this study is an autoethnography, my role as the participant satisfies the measure for this criterion and this method supports a small sample size of one. Even so, justification for adding layered accounts from interviews was also aligned with my methodology. According to Holman Jones et al. (2016), thick descriptions in the context of autoethnographies pertain to the writing style, which is “not overwritten...” but precise in contextualizing conversations that are culturally situated (p. 375). Similarly, Holman Jones et al. (2016) supported the use of additional participants to layer the autoethnographic narratives as opposed to the purpose of providing participant variation.

Furthermore, my inclusion of storytellers as participants was not to inform the dependability of my study as that would be incongruent to my study's framework and

design. Rather, these storytellers served a unique role to add layered accounts to my CTs as a form of collective witnessing, storytelling, and a cultural and intergenerational link for engagement with me as the researcher (Ellis, 2004, 2007; Holman Jones et al., 2016). As such, the necessity for participant variation was not a measure for this autoethnography because my CTs are the focus of my study, and thus are the anchor for my study's dependability.

Confirmability

Like the challenges that are often associated with credibility, according to Ravitch and Carl (2016) confirmability affirms the assumption that the researcher will be objective. Within my research design, I accounted for this aspect through the inclusion of various types of data sources and data analysis. Even so, Ravitch and Carl also asserted that qualitative researchers could embrace a research method that values the way in which researchers' biases and social location(s) shape qualitative analysis and interpretation.

Similarly, Morrow (2005) supported a shift from positivism and distinguished an evolved view of confirmability that suggests that qualitative researchers must aim for a rigorous review of findings that are found to be adequate within the study design. This consideration is particularly important for my critical autoethnography. The process of embracing the self-reflexivity aspects of my study also echoes the notion of sincerity as described above, as an over-emphasis on confirmability in some instances would contradict and weaken the congruency between theory, method, and design (Morrow,

2005). Overall, any emphasis on confirmability does not overshadow the desire for a meaningfully coherent and well-aligned research study (Tracy, 2010).

Rigor

A significant consideration for autoethnography is establishing a plan for methodological rigor. Researchers urge that research methods remain aligned with the integrity and purpose of study even within the less confined structure of a qualitative approach (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Hays et al. (2016) studied the use of rigorous indicators used in qualitative research articles over the span of 15 years and identified a connection between increased emphasis placed on measuring rigor in qualitative studies and the use of different strategies over time. Various strategies to increase rigor were considered for my autoethnography and are based on the common uses and misuses of autoethnography that are outlined in the following section (Chang, 2016; Ellis et al., 2011).

Common (Mis)Use of Autoethnography

The use of autoethnography as a research methodology is emerging as a qualitative approach to explore experiences that can illuminate larger cultural and societal phenomena (Boylorn & Orbe, 2016, 2021; Chang, 2016; Ellis, 2004; Ellis et al., 2011; Holman Jones et al., 2016). Even so, researchers conduct autoethnography in many ways that present challenges for understanding trustworthiness within specific approaches used in this methodology. Therefore, it was important for me to note the common uses and misuses of autoethnography, to help inform my decisions in developing my research design. Below I outlined both the uses and misuses of autoethnography and discuss examples from my study design.

To start, there are ways in which autoethnography are similar in structure that informed the appropriateness of using autoethnography as method. For instance, Ellis and Adams (2014) shared seven elements of writing autoethnography:

- An emphasis on personal experience.
- Familiarity with existing research.
- Using personal experience to describe and critique cultural experience.
- Taking advantage of and valuing insider knowledge.
- Breaking silence, reclaiming voice.
- Healing and maneuvering through pain, confusion, anger, and uncertainty.
- Writing accessible prose.

My critical autoethnography focused on my personal (re)collections, specifically, my experiences within ISI, wellness, and pursuit of academic presence, which also placed value on my insider knowledge as a Black woman. In Chapter 2, I provided an exhaustive overview of existing research related to my research topic and that identified the need for my study. My study featured accessible writing prose, reflected in the various literary writing tools I used in my CTs. The use of narratives as a method of taletelling, storytelling, and truth telling is a way towards joyful resistance in departing from self-silencing and (re)claiming my voice (Dillard, 2012; Ellis et al., 2011).

Through this iterative process of (re)membering myself, it was inevitable that I would also navigate through healing emotional wounds from my past. I included additional participants using semistructured interviews as an informal form of collaborative witnessing to make my writing accessible and relatable to those outside of

academe, which Adams et al. (2015) described as an avenue for audience reciprocity and engagement.

Also, a necessary consideration for my study was an understanding of how autoethnography is misused. Chang (2016) provided guides for my consideration as I designed this research study and outlined five common misuses of autoethnography:

- Excessive focus on self in isolation from others.
- Overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation.
- Exclusive reliance on personal memory and recalling as a data source.
- Negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narrative.
- Inappropriate application of the label “autoethnography.”

While the nature of this critical autoethnography was the focus on my experiences, a major aspect of my CTs occurred within the cultural setting of identity and academia which will invariably bring in the experiences I had with others, like professors. In this way, I studied the themes and context of the cultures of interest and thus avoided the pitfall of producing an autobiographical text that contributed no significance towards a research context. My incorporation of various data sources avoided the overreliance on personal memory recall as the sole data source. Lastly, I accounted for ethical standards as they apply to autoethnography and considered how my study would address these concerns. More specifically, I expanded beyond memory as a source of data to include semistructured interviews and archival artifacts, like written communications and research journal entries (Ellis et al., 2011; Chang, 2016).

Next, the pitfall concerning inappropriately labeling a study as autoethnography. As discussed in Chapter 1, EF and critical autoethnographers hold the belief that none of our stories truly belong solely to us, as in, our lives are often intertwined intimately with others. Even though the CTs centered my lived experiences, it would be reductive of me to not consider the ways in which many people, my ancestry, my family, and many others have been an integral part of my existence. I considered my rationale for not using a slash punctuation as a symbolic representation of the interconnectedness of stories (i.e., auto/ethnography), and determined that the word autoethnography itself, accurately depicts the connection between my story (auto) and the collective cultural experiences (ethnos) that inform this study.

Lastly, Wood (2017) described the importance of transparency within autoethnographic narratives regarding the inclusion of identifiable information and the responsibility of the researcher to offer insights regarding their ethical procedures to protect others while maintaining the integrity of the narrative. I employed rigorous overview of ethical concerns related to my study and abided by a thorough IRB application process to ensure that I addressed any ethical concerns related to my study.

For these reasons, my critical autoethnography should withstand scrutiny when measured against these elements of appropriate use as well as avoiding the common pitfalls.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical procedures for autoethnography can present complex and unique challenges. One common ethical issue within autoethnographic research is protecting the

autonomy and confidentiality of others who are intertwined within the author's personal narratives (Adams et al., 2015). Additionally, there are specific ethical procedures related to Institutional Review Board (IRB) processes I considered that pertain to my use of research participants (DiPersio, 2014). As such, in this next section I address the various (mis)uses of autoethnography and outline the IRB procedures that I proposed, and which were subsequently approved, to hold myself to an astute level of accountability, supported by the literature, to conduct this critical autoethnography.

DiPersio (2014) discussed the importance of using the IRB review process prior to engaging in research with human subjects as data sources. Researchers should understand the risks associated with their research and engage in rigorous efforts to mitigate harm, protect participants, and maintain integrity throughout the research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004). In my study, I followed the procedures for obtaining IRB approval prior to collecting data from participants.

More specifically, for my critical autoethnography I followed the IRB procedures pertaining to my inclusion of additional participants and outlined my steps for using data collected from these participants. In this section I describe aspects of the IRB process as required by Walden's Research Ethics, Compliance, and Partnerships (RECP) department. Namely, I describe protection of human subjects, outlining my consent process that mitigate ethical risks, and the use of research software and other tools that I used for the treatment of data.

Regarding the appropriate use of data storage software, I used MAXQDA to store, organize, and analyze my data. For the treatment of the data, I recorded the interviews

using Zoom recording software and voice memos. Further, I stored the interview data (recordings and transcripts) electronically in a secure cloud platform, Sync.com, which offers end-to-end encryption and two-factor authentication. I will keep electronic files stored online for five years. Besides my chair and committee member, I will be the only person with access to the stored data.

I approached my additional storyteller participants with respect and transparency, acknowledging them as contributors to the integrity and honesty of this study. I described in written form and verbalized prior to each interview my commitment to reflexivity and reciprocity in a context that fits our relationship, both personally and contextually, which is an important consideration and part of building trustworthiness in research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Further, prior to collecting interview data, I explored ways to mitigate potential risks for my interviewees. Specifically, I considered how my study's inclusion of known participants would impact processes of maintaining consent and as such described these considerations in my consent materials. Lastly, my study included the use of member checking sessions that provided my participants opportunity to review, comment, and when applicable make corrections on my interpretations and observations from our interactions (Holman Jones et al., 2016).

In consideration of myself as a participant, it was apropos to address the ways in which I protected myself throughout this study. First, I considered the prominent role of reflexivity for my study's purpose. Reflexivity is essential for ensuring rigor in qualitative research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Further, my study focused on an internal gaze on my experiences and internalizations of culture and identity where my

reliance on self-awareness and reflexivity. Reflexivity as a process of continuous inner dialogue and self-evaluation of my positionality (Berger, 2013) provoked me to engage deeply in the dialogic nature of autoethnography needed for my study.

Koopman et al. (2020) described the nature of autoethnography naturally embraces research reflexivity and as such I was confronted with questions like “how will my experiences as a Black person, Black woman, Black counselor (and counselor educator), and Black Christian woman embarking on a doctoral journey influence my research?” and “how do I engage in the dual role as the participant and the researcher in a reflexive and rigorous way?” (Personal communication, K. McClish-Boyd, December 2021). In pondering these two questions and at the bequest of my methodologist committee member, I made an initial commitment to use a reflexive research journal to document my experiences throughout this process. Journaling as a reflexive means is important for mental health and in academic research, and thus became my second measure of protecting myself as a participant in this process (Meyer & Willis, 2018; Orange, 2016).

In addition to reflexive journaling, I worked with a Black woman academic wellness coach who holds a PhD in Adult Learning and Leadership and a graduate certificate in qualitative research. She specializes in narrative inquiry and self-reflexivity in research, and approaches coaching from a holistic perspective with the understanding that researchers bring multiple perspectives and varied onto-epistemologies to the research. It is important to detail her academic and cultural background because my study centers my experiences as a Black woman doctoral student. With her guidance, we have

created a research wellness plan that incorporates wellness practices that aid me in self-reflexive, creative, and contemplative research practices that contribute to my wellness (i.e., journal prompts, curated wellness boxes, weekly individual sessions). After each coaching session, I engaged in reflexive journaling to process the layered and multidimensional conversations and continue the deep engagement with my study.

Lastly, throughout this research process I had access to my dissertation committee for support with specific regard to navigating the procedural challenges that arose with the dissertation and more specifically, lending their accountability for the self-reflexivity and vulnerability that was required of me for autoethnographic writing. With their support, my committee and I engaged in dialogue that challenged me to go beyond the surface and encouraged me to answer my research questions with rich rigor, sincerity, depth, and wellness.

There are aspects of my study where I interviewed storytellers to add layered accounts to my narratives and in those interviews, I asked semistructured questions related to my research sub-question. In doing so, I addressed concerns regarding protecting their identity. To increase transparency regarding confidentiality, I offered participants the option to select a pseudonym or if they chose, I selected one for them. Due to the familial nature and closeness in relative proximity, I made the storytellers aware of the possibility that their identity could be implied within my narrative due to the nature of our relationship or their relation to my mother's side of the family. With this consideration, I emphasized their rights as a participant and informed them of their ability

to correct any information that I reported from the interviews that they felt was incorrect or wished to have excluded.

Similarly, to address additional issues related to anonymity of non-participants who may be implicated in a harmful, damaging, or exposing way as a result of inclusion in my CTs, I used composite characters in the narratives to protect the identity of such individuals (Adams et al., 2015). Compositive characters shield the identity of individuals by masking identifiable attributes and integrating key components of the individual into the storytelling (Griffin, 2016; Joseph, 2020; Salter, 2019). Further, each storyteller had the ability to review the transcripts from the interviews to provide or clarify information. I also reminded them that they can withdraw consent at any point in the research collection process. Additionally, I described the nature of my study and how the results will be disseminated in my consent form and reviewed with participants.

I would be remiss if I underplayed the power dynamics that existed within the researcher-participant relationship. As such, I adhered to the American Counseling Association (ACA)'s *Code of Ethics* (2014), code G.3.a., as it pertains to understanding and addressing the benefit or risks associated with “extending current research relationships beyond conventional parameters” (p. 16). I considered the risks with interviewing storytellers who I personally know or those who are related to me. For my study, the role of these familial and familiar storytellers is critical to understanding the minimal risk associated with this decision. First, I recruited individuals whom I know personally, who are connected to me or my mother's side of the family and who are over the age of 18. Additionally, I abstained from recruiting any person to whom I hold any

professional or hierarchical position of authority over outside of this study. My participants were recruited based on their ability to provide insight into aspects of my CTs and thus their role was limited and provided them with liberty to decide how much personal information they would offer as their engagement gave them option to solely focus on my broad research questions as layered insight. As such, their role was tertiary in that they were not obligated to self-implicate themselves or share details about their life which helped to minimize the psychological risk associated with my study.

Secondly, participation in my study was voluntary and I informed everyone I recruited of their ability to withdraw their consent to participate at any time during the study. Further, since I was in no role of authority over participants, there were no economic or professional risks related to their decision to participate. The potential of emotional risk that I considered was their potential fear of not being helpful with my study given the nature of their relationship to me. I was able to address this through the member checking follow-up interviews, which seemed to offer each participant insight into how their interviews helped my study. Additionally, to my knowledge, there were no known negative impacts to our interpersonal relationship. There was no compensation for participation in this study. Lastly, I diligently mitigated any unforeseen risks as they arose after the study began and consulted frequently with my committee members. My proposed plan was to consult with the IRB office to make any necessary changes should any challenges arise between myself and the storytellers. There were no issues that required consultation in this manner, and as such no revisions to the original plan were made.

My consent form outlined my research purpose, questions, and the role of storytellers (participants) in my critical autoethnography. My consent form also described perceived benefits and risks of participation. Subsequently, my procedure for obtaining consent was two-fold: (1) written consent that was signed and returned by each participant and (2) verbal consent at beginning of interview. For written consent, I obtained signatures from each participant and stored securely in my possession via Sync.com cloud storage software. Secondly, I incorporated process consent where I obtained verbal consent from my participants at the beginning of each interview. This helped reinforce the collaborative nature of these trusted conversations and promoted autonomy in their role as participants throughout the process. More specifically, both forms of consent reminded participants of their ability to decline answering questions and promoted their ability to focus solely on the questions I presented without feeling pressure to self-disclose or share any information that they were uncomfortable with during the interview sessions. In addition to the inclusion of my research study's description, I included the guiding questions for the interviews. Additionally, the consent form offered information on how to withdraw consent at any point in the study as well as provided my participants with information on how to contact me, my dissertation advisor, or the IRB office with any concerns.

I also considered exclusionary criteria for my storyteller participants. For example, Black women from my father's side of the family that I initially considered, but later excluded due to several factors (like age of family member, and the limited amount of time spent with me during my school-aged years). Being that my focus was on my

internalization of identity juxtaposed between spirituality, Black femininity, and education, a major consideration for inclusion as a storyteller for my study was the amount of time spent with these individuals that would significantly inform specific aspects of my life. Therefore, due to physical distance with most of my father's side of the family living out of state, I did not have much consistent interaction with my aunts. Further, age was another consideration for exclusion, as my father is the youngest of thirteen children, and he has one living sister remaining, who is now 87. These considerations justified excluding women on my father's side of the family.

Additional exclusionary criteria were for individuals who are members of vulnerable populations who would be at-risk for engaging with the subject without full comprehension or understanding of their involvement in this study. Lastly, for those involved in my study who are pivotal for the retelling, but from whom I cannot obtain consent from, I used literary devices and composite characters that removed identifiable characteristics. I reviewed exclusionary criteria for my study throughout my study and discussed frequently with my committee to make sure participants fit the criteria as outlined in my IRB application and based on the need for my study.

The Chapter Sankofa

I opened each chapter with an Audre Lorde quote; however, this chapter's quote emphasized the need to depart from using the *master's tools* to dismantle systems created to oppress others. I have come across this specific quote most frequently in Black feminist texts and particularly in support of moving away from methods of inquiry that were designed without critical influences of diverse cultures in mind. This quote probes

researchers, particularly those who aim to dismantle systemic oppression, to not fall into the trap of using the very tools that helped construct these systems to dismantle it. The Sankofa retrieval for this chapter is steeped in my desire to fuse my cultural identity with my academic pursuits in a quest for knowledge. This (re)cognition of the design features necessary to uphold the sovereignty of voice was the focus of this chapter. In reflection, this chapter provided a detailed overview of my research design, my significant role in the study, methodological choices, and understanding of trustworthiness that aligned with my theoretical, conceptual, and methodological design.

Interwoven together with endarkened theoretical and conceptual frameworks, I used this chapter to respond to a profound need for rejecting spectatorship in research of Black women and reclaim agency in my dissertation as an intentional act in alignment with social change inquiry. I described instrumentation and recruitment processes that align with study design and elaborated on measures of goodness and ethical considerations. I propose that while my critical autoethnography is analytical in many aspects of its design and analysis, and evocative because I intentionally designed this dissertation to inspire engagement, reactions, and introspection that can provoke critical conversations about Black women's experiences with identity and wellness in higher education.

In this chapter, I also described common uses and misuses of autoethnography and ways that I plan to follow outlines of appropriate use (Boylorn & Orbe, 2016, 2021; Chang, 2016; Ellis, 2004; Ellis et al., 2011; Holman-Jones et al., 2016), while avoiding pitfalls associated with the misuse of autoethnography as method (Chang, 2016). More

specifically, I expounded on my rationale for selecting critical autoethnography as research design based on the methodological and onto epistemological alignment with my research purpose and problem that I addressed in this study. The framework, procedures, and methodology follow experts in autoethnography and critical autoethnography – reflecting analytical, evocative, and creative methods of answering my research questions, while also embracing the subsequent results of any narrative-based qualitative inquiry (Bhattacharya, 2017; Boylorn & Orbe, 2016, 2021; Chang, 2016; Ellis, 2004; Ellis et al., 2011; Holman Jones et al., 2016).

In Chapter 4, I describe the demographics of my participants and describe the setting of my data. I clarify challenges and outcomes regarding the study design and revisited my data collection and analysis plan. Lastly, I share the themes and sub-themes from analyzing the CTs. Additionally, excerpts from the CTs are presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: (Re)Presenting Results

If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive. — Audre Lorde

Introduction

The purpose of this critical autoethnography was to explore how I, as a Black woman, navigated merging fragmented parts of myself to inform my professional identity as a counselor educator through negotiations of culturally situated experiences of race, gender, intersectionality, creativity, and spirituality while completing my doctoral degree. The critical research question guiding this study was: What are the experiences of (un)wellness of a Black woman while managing the intersections of ISIs, academic presence, spirituality, and social (in)justice while earning her doctorate in a CES program? My research subquestion was: How do multiple generations of Black women define, describe, and endorse experiences of ISI through the lens of Black womanhood, spirituality, education, and social (in)justice?

The research purpose and questions informed the nature of my study. Therefore, the use of critical tales (CTs) to (re)present the data for this critical autoethnography was a choice I made to explore the use of creative nonfiction to retell and story personal experiences in the context of my research purpose. In this chapter, I provide a review of the research setting, demographics of the storytellers, and an overview of my data collection procedures. I provide details of how the data collection plan impacted trustworthiness of this study and describe my data analysis process. Lastly, I share the

CTs followed by (re)presenting the research results with examples from the various data sources.

Setting

The setting of the CTs included multiple sites of inquiry within timelines across my lifespan and doctoral journey and included information derived from multiple sources of data, like artifacts, as described in Chapter 3. Specific considerations that developed throughout the process of writing the CTs helped to refine the focus in an iterative process. One of these considerations led to my decision to use fictional settings like a counseling office or Zoom meeting for some of the CTs to protect the identities of individuals who would otherwise be easily identified had the setting been more specific to the setting where the events occurred (e.g., specific course during my doctoral program). Although the fictional settings do not completely mitigate this risk, they do significantly reduce the likelihood of recognition.

My CTs timeline occurred across past and immediate present timelines interwoven into the real and fictional settings. As such, the main writing style I used was literary present tense. Primarily, using memory and context added from storytelling participants, my life experiences in my doctoral program were the primary site of inquiry. More specifically, the site of inquiry also represented time frames for the narratives that (re)present different points of time on my doctoral journey (e.g., beginning of my program, completing coursework, dissertation phase).

The primary site of inquiry of my study reflected my cultural identity as a Black woman rooted in childhood experiences, I described using personal (re)collections in the

CTs. Additionally, academia was a cultural setting and represented its own culture of professionalism in my CTs. Secondly, the setting of my narratives varied between the autobiographical context of my personal (re)collections and fictional settings used for the CTs. Lastly, trusted conversation interviews and archival data were collected at separate time intervals and later incorporated into the CTs.

Personal (Re)Collections

The nature of this critical autoethnography centered the exploration of my intersecting identities as a Black woman as representative of the setting of my life experiences and used memory as the primary site of inquiry. As described in Chapter 2, the CTs were written in a way to highlight the dialogue and experiences without relaying identifying information of any particular person or place. I used the personal (re)collections as the foundation for the CTs and used a combination of writing styles that, at times, switched between literary present tense to past tense where needed. These personal (re)collections of past experiences are the basis of context of the stories I am retelling and thus are interspersed throughout the CTs. In the prologue, I provided a roadmap for reading this dissertation and introducing the first critical tale.

Archival Artifacts and Reflexive Journaling Memos

The artifacts I used to support the CTs were supplemental and presented information relevant to the settings and stories. I also used an amalgam of biblical and historical figures as well as people from my life to develop the fictional characters that supported the storying of my experiences. Most of the artifacts used for this study were within my possession and were largely constricted to the timeframe of 2017–2021, apart

from some older artifacts that represent a key element or memory in the narratives. Additionally, public information related to social injustice that occurred within my designated timeframe were also used as artifacts.

Storyteller Interviews

For the trusted conversations with storytellers, I used an informal interviewing style with eight guiding questions related to address my research question. Additionally, I collected the storyteller participants' data using voice and video recording software program Zoom, which has integrated transcribing capabilities and audio recording. I kept both paper and electronic reflexive research journals to create and store my memos, thoughts, and processes that I included in my study as data sources.

Demographics

Table 1 includes information about storyteller participants for my study. The storyteller demographics provide information on generation, education level, spirituality, and which stereotypical trope(s) (i.e., SBW, ABW) the storyteller identified in their interview. Each storyteller met the participation criteria for my study; all were over the age of 18, Black women, and related to my mother's side of the family. The storytellers are not necessarily a part of the events I shared in the stories; however, their role was to provide insight through their interviews that were incorporated into the CTs. I am the only storyteller who was responsible for contributing to all forms of data sources used to create the CTs.

Originally, I considered the inclusion of Black women who were significant figures in my academic and doctoral journey; however, the rich data gathered from three

storytellers was more than enough to answer my research question and subquestion related to the intersecting identities explored in this study. I determined that additional participants would not have added significantly more to the study as their perspectives would be limited to academic and professional spaces; the information gathered from the storytellers on my mother's side of the family represented experiences with me that captured the interconnectedness of my identities over a larger span of time.

My grandmother, who passed away in 2019, represents another generation ingrained within my story and is therefore listed as a storyteller. I open this dissertation with a narrative about how she instilled a sense of voice and spirituality into me, which is evident throughout all the CTs. Additionally, her upbringing during a time shortly after the civil rights movement and her social advocacy endeavors, particularly regarding access to quality education, were illuminated by the other storytellers and thus intertwined throughout my study.

Table 1

About the Storytellers

Name	Age range	Trope identified	Education level	Spiritual (Y/N)
Rhemma (self)	30–39	SBW, ABW	Master's degree	Y
Gay-Gay†	90–99	—	High school graduate	Y
Vessa*	40–49	SBW, ABW	Bachelor's degree	Y
Anastasia*	70–79	SBW	High school graduate	Y

Note. Demographic overview of storytellers derived from interview data. †Gay-Gay

passed away in 2019 so the age represented is her age in present day. * Pseudonyms are used to protect participants' identities.

Data Collection

This qualitative research study was completed within 32 weeks after committee approval of the dissertation proposal on January 13, 2022, and IRB approval on February 10, 2022 (#02-10-22-0742755). After IRB approval, I began drafting the narratives and tales based on the inclusion criteria discussed in Chapter 3. I gathered archival artifacts related to the tales and began recruiting storyteller participants for interviews. The table in Appendix D outlines my research timeline as researcher–participant and reflects aspects of key junctures of the process I engaged in from IRB approval until completion of the dissertation.

Following the procedures outlined in Chapter 3, the process of crafting the CTs was iterative and developed intuitively throughout the process (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021). My process of constructing the CTs began with retelling personal (re)collections of specific events that occurred throughout my educational pursuits, culminating in experiences throughout my doctoral studies. I used various retelling methods, including drafting written accounts of events and verbally recording the stories using a voice recorder app and the dictation feature on Microsoft Word. This was an iterative process throughout data collection.

Artifacts were gathered throughout the process and organized into data management software MAXQDA. When relevant, the artifacts were included in the CTs as informative data that aided my memory. Data were gathered from storytellers through interview sessions lasting on average around 90 minutes per interview. I followed my interview protocol and used guiding questions. The interviews were recorded using

teleconferencing software, and audio files were transcribed and uploaded to Sync.com for storage. Both storytellers completed a member-checking session approximately 1-2 weeks after their interview. During the member-checking sessions, I reviewed and provided a synopsis of analysis results via a Zoom audio call. I used the additional insights during these conversations to add depth to my analysis.

Another part of data collection was documenting my data collection process as the study progressed. This was a form of meta collecting to support future iterations of my study. For instance, in Chapter 3, I described my process of writing the CTs and voicing the CTs. These are procedures that were intuitive to my data collection process and are included in this chapter to provide an insider view that is open to critique and that demonstrates the layers I encountered in completing this autoethnography. My procedure for data collection included an iterative and intuitive process of engaging back and forth with each data source and-consisted of the following steps: (a) write personal (re)collections, (b) gather artifacts related to personal (re)collections, (c) recruit storytellers, (d) interview storytellers, (e) analyze Part I of storyteller interviews, (f) write and analyze critical tales, (g) storyteller member-checking sessions, and (h) revise and analyze critical tales.

Variations in Data Collection

There were no variations in data collection procedures from that discussed in Chapter 3. Once IRB approval was obtained, I began constructing my CTs. I collected data to inform the CTs first by writing personal (re)collections and gathering relevant artifacts. These two steps were repetitive throughout the data collection process. The

drafts of the personal (re)collections and the artifacts gathered were based on my experiences at various intersections of identity. Next, I recruited participants and conducted two storytelling interviews. After the interviews, I drafted the CTs, taking the collection of tales completed in Step 1 and merging them within larger contexts. Specifically, following the criteria outlined in Chapter 3, I narrowed down the personal (re)collections and artifacts using my inclusion criteria: (a) stories of Black womanhood, (b) academic journey in counselor education, and (c) personal responses to social injustice. I then completed member-checking sessions with storytellers. Lastly, I returned to the CTs to revise and analyze for completion and relevance.

The writing of the CTs was a repetitive and iterative process that had several layers of revising. More specifically, the CTs that I wrote incorporated insights from all data sources, including personal (re)collections (from memory as early as age 7), artifacts in my possession (dated between December 2019 and December 2021), and information gathered from the storyteller interviews (conducted in March and April 2022). I used a combination of writing styles to build a consistent writing practice throughout my study. I did not focus on perfecting, but rather on voicing the narratives through expressive writing in the most authentic way. I retold and shared these personal (re)collections with a trusted individual (i.e., academic wellness mentor) and recorded myself telling and (re)telling the stories using voice memos, which I later transcribed.

During the recruitment phase of my study, I solicited participation from storytellers via an IRB-approved email (Appendix C). From this initial request, I received three respondents who expressed interest in participating in my study. All respondents

completed their consent forms, and I then followed up with an email to schedule their interviews using a scheduling calendar integrated into the web-conferencing application. One respondent who completed the consent form did not schedule an interview. I followed up with this respondent via email and text reminders. I texted the respondent 2 days after sending the initial scheduling request email to remind them to schedule and included the scheduling link. Next, a week after the second attempt to schedule, I sent a reminder email via the scheduling application, which included links to available interview times. After this attempt to schedule, I left the calendar invite active for 2 weeks from the date of the last attempt to keep availability open should the respondent decide to participate. Despite the familiar and close relationships with my potential storytellers, I did not want to take advantage of this closeness by continually requesting. At the end of the 2-week period, I closed my interview scheduling link and stopped recruitment.

Throughout this iterative process, and particularly throughout recruitment, I considered the benefit of each additional storyteller recruited. When I reached the point of two participants who were members of my mother's side of the family, I considered the richness of information I would gather by continuing to recruit. More specifically, I examined how information-rich these potential participants' contributions would be, noting that outside of women on my mother's side of the family, these participants' entire contribution would be used only to inform my memory for the CTs. For instance, several potential participants were actively experiencing loss, stressors related to school, and

living through major life changes, and I decided the benefit of their participation did not outweigh the burden.

Storyteller Contributions

In the demographics section of this chapter, I specified which storytellers endorsed which stereotypical trope. Additionally, I did not break out of the dialogue or storytelling within the tales themselves to denote which specific details shared by storytellers I used to inform my memory which kept the CTs as told from my perspective. This process aligned well with the proposed role of the storytellers, which was to help with my memory recall. One specific distinction I did make regarding storyteller contributions, however, occurs in my analysis of the storyteller interviews, particularly for the responses to Part II of the interview questions that asked for descriptions and definitions of key concepts of my study. Within this context, the rich descriptions gathered from that specific portion of the interview stand alone to show the generational context across the answers of each storyteller, identified by their chosen pseudonym.

Soliciting Honest Critique

For critical autoethnography, it was essential to have resonance within the larger context of community. My aim was also to evoke critical discourse on topics of social change which requires creating a literary work that is fluid and capable of reaching broad audiences through various cultural lens. As such, opening my CTs up for critique was necessary. There are a multitude of ways to receive critique from others that are widely used within autoethnography, including listening to, and performing storytelling for various audiences (Joseph, 2008). I employed several writing methods in the creation of

my narratives and continued to workshop my narratives throughout the iterative process of this study. For example, I developed my method of storytelling in writing workshops, courses, and coaching services that helped me refine my narrative writing practice. Specifically, my work with an academic writing coach offered critique of my writing style and structure that translates to research writing. Additionally, I sought critique from academic coaches, committee members, and trusted clinicians who could provide perspective on specific professional contexts and in review of my storytelling, which I incorporated throughout the writing process. My process for storying my academic journey to address my research question also involved engaging in critiques from professional editors, my dissertation committee, an academic wellness mentor, and professional colleagues to review components of my CTs, particularly critiquing dialogue with fictional characters, writing flow, and overall clarity of the narratives.

Data Analysis

I used various coding processes to analyze the data for this autoethnography, selecting processes most appropriate for the types of data to provide an in-depth critique. I used open coding methods that included process coding and in vivo coding as described by Kim (2015) and Saldaña (2013) for my CTs and Part I of the storytelling interviews. The open coding process allowed me to move from coded units to related categories and themes (Saldaña, 2013). Further, I used a priori coding (Saldaña, 2013) from existing literature and from my theoretical framework to denote codes derived. Next, I employed a critical analysis lens (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021; Saldaña, 2013) to interpret the codes to answer my research questions. The critical analysis lens offered approaches that

consider cultural relevance and congruence that are considered throughout the data collection and analysis process. For instance, I was careful to understand the need for cultural sensitivity while I interviewed my storytellers, considering their demographics when exploring topics in my study.

Additionally, regarding congruence, I offered myself checkpoints with the assistance of trusted individuals who proofread and provided feedback throughout my process to ensure I was examining the data honestly. Lastly, I moved from coding to analysis and used an endarkened narrative analysis with an intersectional lens (Bhattacharya, 2017; Boylorn & Orbe, 2016, 2021; Ellis, 2004) to establish categories and themes in consideration of how the various data sources were interconnected were interconnected with my study's concepts and theoretical framework. The intersectional lens was relevant to understand that I had to consider the role of gender and race in my collection and analysis. I found myself often throughout data analysis noting the impact of racial oppression from my personal (re)collections, but then would find myself having to sort through the role of gender in my internalizations. There was a noticeable significance in having to remind myself of both aspects being interconnected and thus needing to be analyzed as such.

According to Chang (2016), the movement back and forth from the internal gaze onto the interactions with others is a process that is inherent to the autoethnographic process. This process of navigating the various data sources and interpreting within the cultural context was continuous throughout data analysis and interpretation. Furthermore, it was important that my collected data be interpreted through the lens of my EF

conceptual framework; therefore, I used narrative analysis that incorporates multiple lens of intersectionality, criticality, and feminism to synthesize my data both substantively, conceptually, and theoretically as outlined by Esposito and Evans-Winters (2021) and Saldaña (2013). Another consideration that I explored was the use of software for data analysis. Esposito and Evans-Winters (2021) encouraged the use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis systems (CAQDAS) to assist with analyzing and storing the data. Based on the volume of data I collected, I used MAXQDA for CAQDAS as it is the most appropriate software program to fit my needs.

Organizing and Theming the Data

I remained flexible throughout the data analysis process and used open coding and in vivo coding methods through each pass-through of the data. I organized the data by codes, categories, and themes and recognized an interconnectedness between the concepts of my study. For example, codes related to Black womanhood captured concepts related to identity represented by categories of internalization, self-definition, and negotiation. Another example is that self-identity was fluid with codes related to Black womanhood and codes describing spirituality. Similarly, social justice advocacy was interconnected with tales of wellness, spirituality, and identity.

The themes that emerged from my analysis indicated a strong connection between my study's concepts. For instance, there were themes related to experiences of wellness within intersecting identities and internalized stereotypes in academic contexts. Several themes also relate to my methodology and as such provide insight into the need for more culturally responsive pedagogical and research practices that create safety for Black

women to explore the intricacies of ISI and (un)wellness. More specifically, Theme 1: (Re)learning endarkened joy through creative expression and the sub-theme: **Enduring the process of looking inward to find truth**, resonated with various facets of wellness (and unwellness) that can be supported (or disrupted) within academic spaces. Such as, the need for supportive spaces for Black women to express range of emotions and experiences held within these intersecting identities. These themes also reflected how the type of introspective processes described within this study that are conducive to supporting Black women in pursuing wellness throughout their academic journey. Thus, the results themselves are multifaceted and reflect the meta-analysis of the data collected as well as my experience as the researcher/participant collecting and analyzing the data.

Additionally, results from the storyteller interviews supported interconnectivity between core themes identified as well, which added an unexpected layer to the themes. For instance, the results from storytellers endarkened insight into viewing social justice as expression of spirituality. These insights led to recognition of themes and sub-themes that illustrated the role of generational conceptualization for understanding internalized beliefs on Black women's identity, advocacy, and spirituality.

Discrepancies in the Data and Generational Context of Data

Other than vantage points related to age of participants, there were no discrepancy cases found in this study. An important consideration for my study was to explore the generational context of my research focus. Thus, the age ranges of my participants and I were embraced for my study. Further, my research sub-question sought to explore the differences in insights, definitions, and (re)collection of experiences based on age, which

informed the generational context my study's purpose. More specifically, there are several decades between all three participants, myself included, from age range of 30s to 70s. With the inclusion of memories recalled from myself and my other two participants through our collected knowledge of my grandmother, then the distance between age ranges is from 30s to 90s.

The age difference lends itself to enriching the insight of the similarities and differences of social issues facing Black women and in particular, Black women's understanding of the personal experiences I explored in this study. The most prominent example, which I discussed earlier in this section, was related to differences in defining spirituality. This was confirming of several aspects of my theoretical and conceptual lens, as this discrepancy affirmed the necessity of self-definition – and in particular – the reverence around spirituality that emphasizes the importance of defining one's own spirituality and refraining from offering definitions on the behalf of others.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Assessment of research quality or goodness is associated with how well-aligned the researcher's paradigmatic and onto-epistemological frameworks are with their design (Morrow, 2005). Additionally, the discussion of trustworthiness is essential to supporting a qualitative research design. Each element included in my study design was intentional and balanced between the ethics and overall quality of the study. My approach to trustworthiness for my qualitative research study included the implementation and adjustments of methods for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility and Sincerity

As outlined in Chapter 3, I implemented my plan for credibility and sincerity during data collection and analysis. For instance, I included the use of various data sources to inform my development of the CTs. My personal (re)collections depicted in the CTs were the most vulnerable and credible sources when considering my ability to submerge myself introspectively into my internalization of identity (ISI) to bring forth the most salient tales for transferability of findings. The storyteller interviews and archival artifacts added dimensions to the CTs. Additionally, I conducted member checking sessions to increase accountability for the storytellers, which provided them with oversight on the accuracy of the interview transcripts. Additionally, with the academic support from my committee and academic writing mentors, I upheld the sincerity of the study by honoring the procedures outlined for data collection. Having accountability and guidance from various writing center resources were also helpful for me for maintaining alignment with my research questions and conceptual frameworks throughout the iterative process. Lastly, I engaged in reflexive journaling throughout the process to remain sincere to my study's purpose.

Transferability and Resonance

The concepts I explored in my study are transferable and resonate in several ways related to larger cultural contexts, particularly related to discourse on privilege, oppression, institutional power, and gendered racism. I used the proposed process to delineate between which personal (re)collections, and other data sources to incorporate into the CTs. Following my data collection procedure, the contexts that I explored

provided implications for multiply-marginalized communities' experiences within the politics of learning and teaching while being both Black and a woman, that illuminates discrimination from stereotypical tropes housed within academia (Chan et al., 2018; Etengoff, 2020; Kilgore et al., 2020). Particularly, implications derived from my experiences of being labeled as aggressive when I was asserting myself. Thus, my results can have resonance with understanding and further exploring culturally responsive ways of intervening and supporting Black women's ability to be assertive in academic spaces without retaliation or discrimination (Chan et al., 2018; Etengoff, 2020).

Dependability

My decision to include storyteller participants was not to inform the dependability of my study as that would be incongruent with my study's framework and design. Rather, these storytellers served a unique role to add layered accounts to my CTs as a form of collective witnessing, storytelling, and a cultural and intergenerational link for engagement with me as the researcher (Ellis, 2004; 2007; Holman Jones et al., 2016). As such, the necessity for participant variation was not a measure for this autoethnography because my CTs were the anchor for my study's dependability. There were no variations to the proposal that impacted the dependability of my study.

Confirmability

I accounted for confirmability through the inclusion of various types of data sources and data analysis. The process of embracing the self-reflexivity aspects of my study also echoes the notion of sincerity as described above, as an over-emphasis on confirmability in some instances would contradict and weaken the congruency between

theory, method, and design (Morrow, 2005). I distinguished the contributions from the storytellers from the generational context used in the CTs to remain sincere to the study's purpose. I constructed my questions to use lay terms and avoided use of certain terms and phrases like SBW, to elicit raw responses to the questions that I then analyzed against the literature I found for endorsements of any of the stereotypical tropes for Black women. Similarly, I used search features to illuminate key definitions from literature while analyzing data to highlight aspects of the data that related to that construct. Further, I remained resolved that the parts of the interviews that were used to support the CTs were not used to confirm or disconfirm my personal (re)collections, but rather to add layers of generational context to the storytelling. An aspect of confirmability that arose throughout the iterative process were the findings from the storyteller interviews that offered a depth of perspective on the themes that I found.

Results

The research question guiding this study was: What are the experiences of (un)wellness of a Black woman while managing the intersections of ISI, academic presence, spirituality, and social (in)justice while earning her doctorate in a CES program? Additionally, the subquestion layered within my research question was: How do multiple generations of Black women on the researcher's maternal side of the family define, describe, and endorse experiences of ISI through the lens of Black womanhood, spirituality, education, and social (in)justice?

My results uncovered several realizations related to my research question including the impact of witnessing self and others speak out or (not speak) against social

injustices, witnessing, experiencing, and re-experiencing insensitivity, rejection, and apathy from cultural outsiders, and dancing back-and-forth in academic spaces in a process of fragmentation or (re)membering identity. More plainly, three themes described active processes of going in-and-out of experiences that impacted overall wellness and wholeness of self while navigating the terrain of a rigorous doctoral program. Further, the sub-themes that emerge reflect the complexities of this study as well.

Additionally, my results reflect the culmination of meta-collection and subsequent meta-analysis layered within this study. In the role as both researcher and the researched, my positionality was central to this methodology and as such, my results demonstrated my intentional breaking of the proverbial fourth wall of research to invite the reader into my process. More specifically, throughout the results section you will find my reflexive journal entries documenting my internal process while working on this dissertation. Further, these journal entries were included to address the latter portion of my research question (emphasized in *italics*), “What are the experiences of (un)wellness of a Black woman...*while completing earning her doctorate in a CES program?*” Thus, my results capture the timeframe reflected in the CTs that I described earlier in this chapter as well as capturing the reflexive processes I maintained towards my study’s completion.

The research sub-question was answered by the data collected in Part I of the storyteller interviews (see Appendix B). Particularly, I used the answers to Part I of the interview questions to gather a generational perspective of the interpretations of the key concepts of this study. I originally planned to only use the storyteller interviews to supplement my CTs, however, through the iterative process I found that the results from

Part I of my interview protocol provided such rich data related to my research topic and thus that data also informed the themes found in this study.

Though I originally planned to only use the storyteller interviews to supplement my CTs, through the iterative process, I found that the results from Part I of my interview protocol provided rich data related to my research topic. Therefore, I used Part I from the storyteller interviews to answer the research sub-question and to inform the themes and sub-themes of this study.

(Re)Cognizing Themes

Each of the CTs illustrated an interconnection between concepts through my personal lens of experiences supported by additional collected data. Due to the nature of each narrative having layers of personal (re)collections, interviews, and artifacts, I found it useful to provide a critical synopsis of each tale to provide context for critical discourse. A part of this iterative process was remaining reflexive and open to critique regarding my CTs. The construction of the CTs was a combination of my personal (re)collections, collected artifacts, and incorporating information gathered from the storyteller interviews with individuals who have witnessed aspects of my growing up, education, and overall story.

The themes that emerged from analyzing the data were (re)defining wholeness of identity, (re)engaging advocacy as an expression of spirituality, and (re)learning endarkened joy through creative expression. There were also several sub-themes associated with each theme that represent the layers and complexities within this study. The storyteller interviews supported interconnectivity between core themes identified

above as well as expressed connectedness between social justice as expression of spirituality. Themes discovered from the interviews recognized the importance of self-definition for Black women and their spirituality, and the fusion of social justice with both identity and spirituality.

Theme 1: (Re)defining Wholeness of Identity

One of the themes that emerged from the data was the importance of Black women defining their own identity, including cultural identity and spirituality. Each of the storytellers expressed discomfort in defining the terms of Black womanhood and spirituality for others, sharing their own definition based on their beliefs while reiterating the importance of understanding Black women are complex and not easily defined. This is well supported in research literature. From the stories I heard from my storytellers which I used to inspire parts of my retelling, I realized there were times in younger life where I had defined myself outside of race and gender. A part of redefining self that I discovered in the data was found through witnessing women in my family, particularly on my maternal side, demonstrate the attribute of strength that was linked to achievements against odds and commitment to advocacy work.

In the tale, *The Unprotected Black Woman*, I shared a social media post I made after learning of Breonna Taylor's death which occurred at a time that I was navigating my own gendered-racial identity in my professional, academic, and personal life. Revisiting the memories associated with this post, I was reminded of a time I dealt with fear at my workplace that was based on the racist rhetoric occurring in our country at the time. I was experiencing a type of hyper-vigilance that was hard to describe. I felt unsafe,

and whether rational or not, I felt alone and misunderstood in a predominantly white space. In the tale I wrote,

Years before learning of Breonna Taylor's death, I have been negatively impacted by the images and stories behind these deaths. After a sequence of police brutality deaths in 2016 and the political rhetoric of hate, I began having nightmares of white men with red hats crawling up my patio window and shooting me while I slept. During this time, I was working in a community mental health setting where my office was located near back of the building, isolated from the other therapists. I felt hypervigilant to the hate that seemed emboldened and my location in the building was discomfoting...

... I put in a request for an office in the main hallway near the other therapists. It was denied. I was told about some protocol. Another office in the main hallway became available. I requested and was denied. Each of my subsequent requests were denied, one by one. Months go by and I watched each of my other colleagues move to offices unfettered...

... I never shared my reasoning for wanting to move, besides with my supervisor. I was forced to watch others move about freely without question. This was not about an office. The truth is no matter where I was located at in that building, I was constantly reminded that being Black, being a woman, and wanting to be protected was too much to ask.

In the excerpt above I described being conflicted between exposing a vulnerability as a sacrifice or upholding the veil of strength as a protective factor against exploitation of my pain. I expounded on this experience in *Part II - Critical Tale Realizations*,

... The impact of reading about Black women dying without remorse or justice, and my own feeling of being unprotected while working in a mental health setting. I felt bound within the SBW trope of endurance and resilience through adversity. I remember wondering if I offered up the salacious details of vulnerability regarding my fears, if my request would be granted. Ah, yes, the struggle narrative that is often synonymous with being Black and being a woman. Then, my white administrators could take pity on me and act as though granting this request was some grand gesture and not just a policy that many had taken advantage of without having to share a sad, uncomfortable story. *Had I shared how I felt threatened as a Black woman in the back of the building, would my request have been granted? Or would I stand there, denied, but now exposed at the mercy of this veil of protocol?* But what happens when I no longer want to struggle? The cost of wellness often forfeits dignity, and I was resisting offering that part of myself as a token...

In this part of the critical tale realization, I pointed out the layers of conflict occurring within myself related to this experience. One layer was my awareness of being mistreated in the work environment. Another layer was the aspect of vulnerability that I was resisting. Perhaps partly to maintain the image of strength, but another layer was my awareness of how demeaning it would feel if I had to offer a sad story to have my request

honored. Especially since I understood none of my colleagues whose requests were approved had to do such emotional labor. I was caught between appearing as the ABW, sending emails checking on the status of my request and internally, I was battling my own beliefs of how vulnerability can be mishandled and exploited, which in turn reinforced my ability to ignore my internal gauge in need of wellness.

Subtheme: Honoring Generational Wisdom. The premise of this process of remembering generational tales is inspired by my grandmother, Gay-Gay, whose life encapsulated joy in a remarkable way. I started my tales with her as an anchor to the concept of joy and justice – endarkened joy. My memories of Gay-Gay are deeply spiritual in nature. When I was younger my view of my time with her was fun and mischievous, however, I now realize there were threads of joy that came through her lifetime of advocacy for social justice. This joy also seemed closely linked to her expressiveness of individuality which she tried to instill in me at a young age. Figure 5 is an excerpt from the prologue of my CTs, where I recount a conversation with my grandmother about what type of voices God hears.

Figure 5

Excerpt from Critical Tale “Prologue: (Re)Membering Gay-Gay”

Gay-Gay was the total opposite of me. She was assertive, joyful, and confident. I was quiet, reserved, and constantly lost in my thoughts. I was also very sensitive. With two brothers wrestling around the house, and an older teenage sister who was off doing her own thing, you would find me in a corner or tucked away playing quietly with my toys. I used my imagination to explore and rarely shared my thoughts out loud. But not with Gay-Gay! With Gay-Gay, it was different. As a young girl, around 8 or 9, I would spend longer days with Gay-Gay in the summer. Sometimes my brothers would be there, sometimes just me. I shared my thoughts out loud, and it felt ok to wonder about things. I was careful to watch for her reactions. My questions didn't seem to bother her, and I had a lot of questions. Especially about God. When we weren't playing games or watching her shows, Gay-Gay would be on the phone with her friends, yelling at God. She called it praying. All I knew was that this type of yelling didn't scare me. I thought *she must know God real well to talk to Him so boldly like that.*

“Gay-Gay - does God hear us even when our voices aren't loud?” I asked unsure if God would listen to my tiny voice.

“Oh yes. Yes, He does. He will listen to you however you want to talk. He's there and He wants to hear from you.”

“Why do you yell on the phone sometimes? When you're talking to God are you fighting?” I was concerned.

“No sweetie. I talk like that to God when I am praying for my friends. We get excited because we know He hears us.”

Another layer of my exploration into self was the understanding of the power of generational tales and messages I inherited and interpreted. My interviews with both storytellers shared sentiments of the expectations of Black women to be strong. Vessa reported going through a process now where she no longer wants to hold herself to a standard of perfection. Anastasia shared stories of witnessing generations of strength represented on the maternal side of my family. Both identified witnessing Black women speaking up and advocating for others. More specifically, Vessa stated,

Yeah, I mean, you get this with women, too, where if a woman's assertive, then she's difficult, but with black women, you're angry if you speak up. There's that kind of stereotype, that people will try to gaslight you in that position where there's something wrong with you.

Vessa's endorsement of the ABW stereotype, which matches my experiences of internalizing and minimizing my emotions as a caution to avoid presenting myself as too strong-willed or assertive.

Subtheme: Witnessing Maternal Resilience. Another aspect of both interviews was the aspect of sharing stories of Black women on my maternal side of the family pertaining to the types of issues they saw their mother and grandmothers overcome. Anastasia gleaned lessons from her mother and grandmother regarding her abilities that she attributed to having been modeled to her. Anastasia noted,

Well, because my mother was so strong. And then, of course, my grandmother, which, I just grew up knowing her story. I just always felt that I could do anything, not because I was Black...But I just felt that I could do anything, you know, as a woman...

I could relate to Anastasia's definition of strength as witnessing maternal resilience, noting ways in which I have witnessed my mother exhibit resilience through painful life circumstances. The impact of witnessing maternal resilience also resonated with me as I have several memories that stand out very clearly in my mind when I think of strength and resilience and my mother.

Subtheme: (Re)securing a Sense of Belonging. Both storytellers told stories of Black women in our lineage to include mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers who were seen as strong and deeply spiritual. A part of my (re)membering revealed that at times I felt secure in who I was, and this is reflected in moments reflected on in my

CTs. At other times, I identify with this process of negotiating my definitions of my spirituality and how that impacts my wellness across various settings.

Another thread of insight I found throughout the CTs was recognizing the role of sense of belonging, invisibility, and hypervisibility in professional settings. In the passage below, from the tale, “*Enduring insensitivity in white spaces*,” hypervisibility was illustrated through my self-awareness of Black experience and the internal process that understood the reason for my visibility in that moment:

A white woman asked for an example of a microaggression, noting that ‘it is hard to tell sometimes if the other person was being malicious or not.’ I glanced at the other Black woman on the call. With just one look, I knew we both had stories, but which one of us would be called upon today? I took the bait so she could rest.

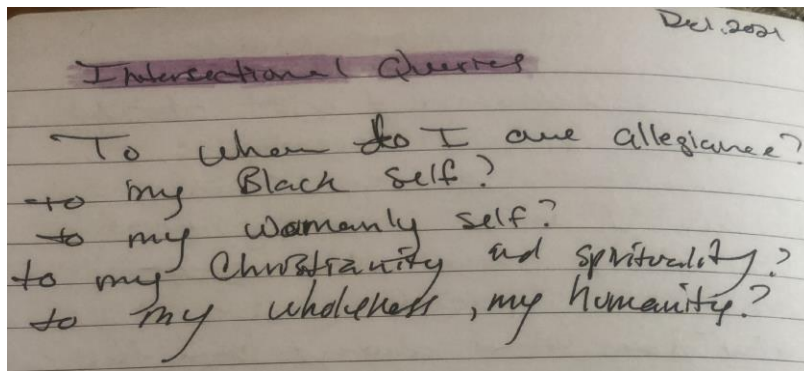
In this tale excerpt, I recount an experience in a predominantly white space where I felt called upon to share a real-life example to help a White woman understand aspects of cultural sensitivity. In this situation, I made myself vulnerable only to have a White woman share her counter-story that would dismiss my experience. There is rarely ever any repair to harm done in these moments because I just wanted it to be over. This example depicts the internal struggle to decide if I would share or depend on another Black person in that same space to share, understanding the repercussions of opening myself up in this type of space. Figure 5 is a snapshot of a journal entry called, “*Intersectional Queries*” where I addressed fragmentation and wrote,

To whom do I owe allegiance?
to my Black self?

to my womanly self?
 to my Christianity and spirituality?
 to my wholeness, my humanity?

Figure 6

Reflexive Journal Entry, December 1, 2021



In Figure 6, I described the impact of hypervisibility as internalized with a pressure within to hide certain parts of an experience to accommodate others. I explored fragmentation throughout my study by piecing together my experiences as told in the CTs and through the data gathered from storyteller interviews. From the data, one realization was the impressions left on me by educators and other authority figures in my life. In particular, the statements that had me question my intellect and abilities that seemed to frame my experiences in higher education through a lens of “proving” self as opposed to embracing self.

Theme 2: (Re)engaging Advocacy as an Expression of Spirituality

There are many beliefs and strengths displayed throughout my tales that highlight the critical nature of spirituality for Black women. Like the theme of self-definition, this theme encompasses attributes that acknowledge the idea of Black women self-defining

spirituality. Similarly, for each storyteller in this study, this notion of re-engaging seemed consistent as an ongoing process of moving back and forth through negotiations of each of the stereotypes regarding being strong (resilient), angry (or opinionated), educated (as in informed) that at times when not managed led to negative impact on one's perception of self.

Anastasia noted aspects of negotiating spiritual identity and understanding what it meant to be a person of faith, while also sharing moments where she felt her faith was strong. She strongly felt that even at points where she may not feel she practices the way she should (e.g., reading Bible, attending church) that the values and beliefs that she learned from her mother and grandmother as deeply rooted in her. She stated,

You know, I always know to go to the Lord for any and everything, and have that connection, that I know that he loves me as much as he loves anybody else. And that he will be there for me. You know, just like he's there for them. You know that prayer part. All that stuff is instilled in you, that's in me and I don't think anybody can ever take that out of me.

In this excerpt, Anastasia reflected on (re)membering her spirituality is defined by her personal connection with her faith. She reflected on the lessons taught to her by her mother and grandmother that "instilled" her faith in her. This realization seemed to offer comfort to her as she considered how her own faith can be self-defined outside of cultural norms that may suggest otherwise.

I had internalized a negative perception of advocacy for self and others and thus separated this identity from my definition of Christianity. Christianity was politeness and

speaking up for yourself, in my eyes, was not polite. Consequently, I saw these negotiations personally manifest through minimizing myself, and appeasing behaviors at the detriment to my own well-being. After recognizing the unjust labor of over-apologizing or accommodating, I began to retreat from these behaviors and later learned to reconnect with my voice through expressive writings.

Figure 7

Critical Tale, “Witnessing Mistreatment”

personal (re)collection // Witnessing mistreatment

When I learned about the Black woman, Dr. Moore, dying shortly after she attempted to advocate for herself while undergoing medical treatment, I was deflated and mortified. Just weeks earlier, the week I started my dissertation course, I wound up in the hospital. I remember a woman of color mentor saying to me, *‘Hospitals make me nervous, and they don’t treat Black women and WOC well....’*

I knew what she meant then, and at the same time recognized my vulnerability in needing to trust those sworn to care for me. Reading this story about Dr. Moore brought back to mind how much I have learned to monitor my emotions, my expressions, ‘not too loud, not too bold’ as the cost of being seen as angry, quite literally could be devastating.

Reflexive Journal Entry, Feb 23rd, 2022

Maybe I’m not angry, maybe I’m tired. When I look back on what was modeled to me, I can’t recall my mother or grandmother ever NOT speaking up. My grandmother used her voice loud and demonstratively on her phone prayer calls. My mother, I saw speak up most when we were out and about. But very specifically, around issues with school. Mom seemed to always have something to say - at least from my point of view.

Figure E17

Facebook Post, December 27th, 2020

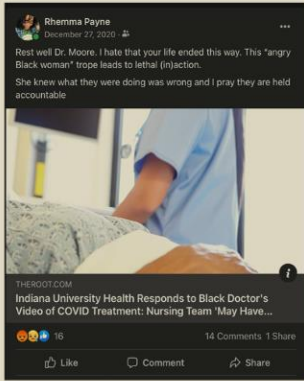


Figure 7 presents the critical tale, “*Witnessing mistreatment*” which includes a present-day reflexive journal entry. More specifically, in this tale I remembered learning about the tragic death of a Black woman in my state who sought medical treatment and was labeled as difficult and angry, which directly impacted her care. In my reflexive journal, I shared, “...I can’t recall my mother or grandmother ever NOT speaking up,” and was battling internally the times I have not advocated for myself, particularly in

predominantly white spaces where I was actively avoiding being labeled as aggressive, angry, or difficult.

Subtheme: Reconciling Generational Advocacy. This sub-theme emerged when I recognized the impact of witnessing advocacy in various forms by Black women on the maternal side of the family, and how each of the storytellers, including myself can recognize ways in which we now advocate for others. This realization also echoes generational wisdom and adds the layer of understanding when and when not to speak up, and the reconciling with self that can stem from either choice. I endorsed the internalization of stereotypical tropes that stigmatize anger in the critical tale, “*Yellin’ and complainin’*” where I shared:

I remember reading all kinds of civil rights books, admiring people like Rosa Parks with the Montgomery Bus Boycotts. I don’t know why it was easier to see their efforts for social justice as noble and my mom’s protests as annoying. But for some reason, this day with my brother was the first time I saw my mother in this light. This was the first time I began to think *‘maybe mom’s not always angry for no reason – maybe for a Black woman and Black mother - this is what love through advocacy looks like.’*

In this excerpt, I recounted a memory where I witnessed my mother advocate for my younger brother. I noted this event as a marker to the beginning of my realization that the *angry* characteristics of my mother, was in actuality, a form of strength that I had admired in other Black women in history. In this tale, I recognized the anger I often witnessed from my mother resembled the attributes of the Black women advocates I

learned about in school. Therefore (re)membering this encounter between my mother, brother, and a teacher helped me recognize the nobility of this type of anger. Rosa Parks was tired and angry. Harriet Tubman was tired and angry. My mother – on this day – was tired and angry. This witnessing came up for me in an experience I had with deciding to leave a Christian community due to mistreatment.

Figure 8

Excerpt from Critical Tale “Reaching the End of Politeness”

in [me],’ that I lost patience. I was running out of grace to extend to those anonymous complaints. I was done. I was done with the extra effort...done with my colleagues’ white fragility. It was odd in a way because for the first time in a long time, it was like I was refusing to let these words penetrate and silence me. I asked to have a meeting with everyone involved. Even though over time I realized I needed to prepare my exit from this environment, I was proud of myself. I can’t remember a time when I advocated for myself to be heard in this way.”

Figure 8 is an excerpt from the critical tale, *“Reaching the end of politeness”* that depicts my lived experiences where I have reached the culmination of a conflict with a White woman in a Christian setting, that was manifesting into exhaustive emotional labor. This critical tale recounts my experience with deciding to cease engaging in email exchanges where I was not being heard and recognizing unfair treatment that was occurring between myself and my White peers.

Subtheme: Negotiating the Politics of Spirituality. Both Vessa and Anastasia discussed circumstances that can be interpreted as feeling there is a distance between how organized religion like Christianity is defined, and how they perceive themselves to be practitioners of spirituality through acts of kindness and advocating for others. These realizations occurred throughout the interview, and it was both inspiring and fascinating

for me to experience as I was reminded of my own tales where I found myself in a conflict with my spiritual practitioner who advocates and speaks up about social injustice. When Vessa talked about spirituality and advocacy, she noted a discrepancy she felt exists from an experience she remembers and shared,

And so as adults we found each other on Facebook, and she met some man on Christian Mingle and moved to [redacted], and he beat the shit out of her. So, she got a divorce, and her family's like, 'Oh, don't get divorced,' and reaching out to her ex-husband who beat her. And that's where religion, it's like, you think God loves the idea of marriage more than your daughter getting beat? That's the kind of stuff where there's some strong disconnect.

In this excerpt, Vessa reflected on how interactions like these made her question her faith practice's view on justice with spirituality as she grappled with the reality that some in her religion may find the sanctity of marriage worth more protection than a person's well-being. From my experience with certain faith communities, I received a clear message of how I was expected to behave as a Christian, which at times opposed my expression of truth and muted my experiences. There appeared to be a direct conflict between me getting support during a difficult time or having my experiences minimized due to the discomfort some were experiencing with my self-expression. The results across my data sources reemphasized the importance of (re)defining spirituality through the lens of taking care of others, stepping in against injustice, and figuring out spirituality.

Theme 3: (Re)learning Endarkened Joy Through Creative Expression

My experiences within this study are framed within the context of learning and education. Namely, the educated Black woman (EBW) trope was a central identity that was fragmented as a part of this study. I found endorsements of both anger and strength throughout my CTs, and the EBW trope appeared mostly within the context of my beliefs about educational attainment and goals. Interestingly, though, this entire dissertation process has been a type of (re)learning that has reignited my joy for education.

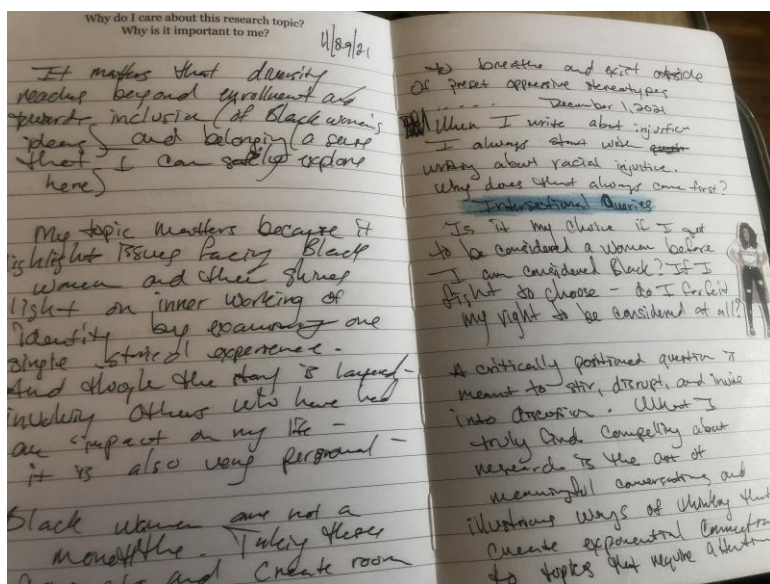
A key factor of endarkened joy is the rooted in the understanding that culturally situated knowledge for Black women that offers insight into the connection between spirituality, creativity, and politics (Hull & Hull, 2001 as cited by Dillard, 2021). Joy for this study represents the spiritual resources available to a person of which to access to cope with psychologically distressing experiences. After analyzing my CTs, I realized that I used endarkened joy throughout my depiction of both realizations of internalized identity, expressing emotions by way of journaling or the fictional counseling setting, and through sharing relevant artifacts which depicted my responses to events happening throughout 2020.

Subtheme: Enduring the Process of Looking Inward to Find Truth. A large part of my iterative process for this study was the support I had to conduct this critical autoethnography. I engaged with an academic wellness coach who was a pivotal part of guiding me through writing this dissertation and maintaining wellness. A prominent part of autoethnographic work is how close and intimate I become with the data and essentially the toll that studying self could take on mental and spiritual health. With

academic coaching from a Black woman, she guided me in using several methods of wellness, one being the use of research journals. Particularly, she has a specific journal that has writing prompts in it. Figure 9 is an example of a self-reflexive journal entry prompt that I responded to as a part of my reflexive journaling process.

Figure 9

Reflexive Journal Entry, November 29, 2021



In this reflexive journal entry, I responded to the prompt, “Why do I care about this research topic? Why is it important to me?” I used reflexive journaling throughout this research process and journaling was essential for my wellness while writing the CTs. Many of the stories I shared in the tales were insights into conditions of my identity that I was unaware of, which created various responses within myself while writing. For instance, there were stories I did not want to write that forced a necessary pause in my writing timeline because when I uncovered certain internalized beliefs, I quickly realized that I needed to tend to those discoveries in an intentionally caring way.

Subtheme: Expressing Truth in Safe Spaces as a Practice of Wellness. As an expansion to my understanding of creative expression, I found spaces to share the unfiltered truth of what I was experiencing. Since graduate school, most of my writing has been devoted to scholarly writing for academic papers, and one outlet I have used consistently to express my pain, anger, and grief regarding social injustices has been expressed via social media. However, throughout this dissertation process, my engagement in reflexive journaling, writing personal (re)collection stories, and vocally expressing my experiences to myself and trusted others, I have found these forms of expression to be both revelatory and healing. Below is an excerpt from the critical tale, “*Caring for the anger inside,*” that depicts this internalized struggle:

To my surprise, I kept shouting, and crying, and voicing everything that was all jumbled together in my heart and my head. I kept sharing about the impact of my anger and how it interferes with my life. The pain was not alarming to me, but I was used to watching peoples’ expressions to monitor myself. But Dr. Naomi wasn’t afraid of my expression, my gestures, nothing. I felt something being released as I raised my voice. Louder and louder – I felt the pain in my head fade. My anger is not scary – I needed a space to let it out – to hear my voice with the cracks and the pain. There is a place for all of it.

In this excerpt I recounted how I felt to be safe to vocalize and express my pain without fear of fragility interrupting my truth-telling or the rawness of my emotions. Many of the experiences I recounted in the tales that depicted corrective experiences with my fictional therapist, Dr. Naomi, were reflective of actual conversations I had with people who were

from marginalized identities, most often, other Black women. These were the conversations that brought to surface my internalized beliefs about my identity. For example, the excerpt above (re)presented an experience I had while attending a BIPOC clinical training where I was paired with a Black woman clinician during a breakout exercise.

I remember what it felt like to fully express my anger about the situation I discuss in this tale and look up and see my breakout partner not retreat but instead hold her attunement with me. I was encouraged with her silence and stillness to keep going. I remember speaking to the large group afterwards and I sharing my experience of being able to fully express my raw emotions with my practice partner without being pacified, muted, or redirected into positivity. The excerpt above depicts a part of my process of re-connecting with myself in a way that brought healing that was welcomed in a safe space. Safe spaces, much like many concepts within my study, should be self-defined. I elaborate on practical implications for curating safe spaces in Chapter 5.

The Chapter Sankofa

Considering the emotional task of self-study and introspection into the internalized experiences of identity, I wanted to complete this study in wellness. In addition to support and guidance, it was imperative that as I studied and (re)presented my CTs that I kept my research purpose and questions centered in the study to manage the scope. Reflexive journaling was a large part of incorporating wellness practices into my study. As I look back on this chapter's results, I honored my reflexive journey while highlighting critical experiences through an endarkened feminist lens that reflected the

cultural contexts of race, gender, spirituality, and creativity. I used multiple data sources to inform the CTs which created a rich overlay of themes and concepts central to my study's purpose. I (re)presented the data in ways that ethically protected those whose lives intertwined with mine, which allowed me to provide an emphasis on the context of the dialogue that informed the critical discourse.

Figure 10

Excerpt from the Critical Tale "Writing While Black"

personal (re)collection // Writing while Black

I remember learning from Gay-Gay that God hears all types of ways of praying. I used to write Him letters and tie the end of a balloon to the single sheet to send it off in the clear blue skies. I was always confident it would reach Him. At some point after my first-grade teacher yelling at me, I developed quite an adversity to loud voices. I developed a slight stutter in speech some time shortly after that incident. It only seemed to surface significantly when I was speaking to adults or authority figures. I imagine I continued to believe that there was a right and wrong way to speak. Sometimes, though, I considered ways to make my voice smaller. I never wanted to yell at anyone because I saw yelling as a part of anger that needed to stay quiet. I eventually found a workaround through writing out my feelings in poems, song lyrics, and short stories – not too loud, not too soft – and most importantly these words could stay hidden. My stutter eventually went away, but my love to write as a form of expression remained. Whatever I imagined, whatever I could envision – there was a place for my written voice to be heard.

It wasn't until late in graduate school that I realized all the accolades and recognition I had received in school for my creative writing were perhaps untrue. I remember meeting with a professor, a woman of color in her office as she often did to review paper feedback with students. I was sure I wasn't in trouble as I had written well in her class. I sat in her office with her in a mess of a circle surrounded by stacked papers, and tables full of books. The knowledge in this room seemed profound.

She seemed busy as she turned her chair around to face me. She handed my paper to me and said, "You write well for a Black student."

The results of my analysis confirmed what I found in the literature review regarding the power of self-definition and expounded on themes related to expressing spirituality through advocacy and practicing wellness with spiritual joy and creativity. The CTs that I present in this study answered my research question to explore the experiences of myself as a Black woman managing multiply-minoritized identities and internalized stereotypes while completing a doctoral degree. Further, my research sub-

question was answered by storyteller interviews which revealed generational layers to Black women on my maternal side of the family's perception of strength, emphasis on self-definition, and connecting social justice advocacy with spirituality. Figure 10 is an excerpt from the critical tale and Figure 11 is an example of the critical tale realizations that are found at the end of each part of the series. The *Critical Tales Series* in its entirety is included in Appendix E.

Figure 11

Example of Critical Tale Realizations

Critical Tale Realizations – Part I

There was something very endarkening about the sequence of tales and understanding how I had mischaracterized the ways the which Black women use our voices as being right or wrong or even too black too opinionated too angry to expressive so while my grandmother anchored my belief in that God would respond to me overtime and through the admonishment of a white woman teacher yelling at me and a non-Black woman educator praising me from being articulate – I had started to associate my education and writing as the way to show that I was not a threat. Consequently, I, too began to judge people like my mother who use their voice in a different way with the trope of angry black woman. The internalized shame of speaking up for myself continued living in my body and manifested in how I wrote in class – apologetic for every word that I used – careful to not disrupt the peace.

Looking ahead, in Chapter 5, I present interpretations, implications, and recommendations based on the results found in my study. Further, I provide an outlook on the use of storytelling and creative expression as modes of inquiry that can help facilitate critical discussions related to social (in)justices, education, and understanding the experiences of Black women. More specifically, I propose the need for future research that evokes a critical response to the impact of the social injustice pandemic that continues to perpetuate the call for social change in the counselor education profession.

Chapter 5: (Re)Engaging in Discussion with Counselor Educators

Any discussion among women about racism must include the recognition and use of anger. This discussion must be direct and creative because it is crucial.

— Audre Lorde

Introduction

Considering the nature of the ever-alarming racial pandemic that is rooted in white patriarchal supremacy, Black women are often centered in social justice efforts, but the rejecting acceptance of their whole self—the joy and the pain, the love and the anger—leads to burnout. Overwhelmingly, Black women are experiencing issues within academic settings that impact their wellness (Porter et al., 2020; Shaver & Moore, 2019). Although these issues are known, there is limited information within counselor education research that explores the impact of internalization of stereotypes that may compound Black women’s wellness. Counselor education is a growing field with high demand for competent, responsive, and culturally sensitive counselors. Therefore, understanding the status of well-being for Black women studying to be counselor educators would inform research and encourage discussion of practices that promote longevity across multiple wellness domains for multiply marginalized counselor educators (Acosta, 2019; Erving, 2018; Shillingford et al., 2013).

The purpose of this study was two-fold: to add to the limited research on the negative impact of Black women’s ISIs and to explore ways of knowing and researching Black women’s lived experiences within a culturally congruent theoretical, conceptual, and methodological lens. The purpose of this critical autoethnography was to explore

how I, as a Black woman, navigated merging fragmented parts of myself, to inform my professional identity as a counselor educator through negotiations of culturally situated experiences of race, gender, intersectionality, creativity, and spirituality while completing my doctoral degree.

As a Black woman, I have experienced a progression of (un)wellness depicted in these CTs where the following themes emerged: (a) Theme 1: (Re)defining wholeness of identity, with the three subthemes, *honoring generational wisdom*, *witnessing maternal resilience*, and *(re)securing a sense of belonging*; (b) Theme 2: (Re)engaging advocacy as an expression of spirituality with two subthemes, *reconciling generational advocacy* and *negotiating the politics of spirituality*; and (c) Theme 3: (Re)learning endarkened joy through creative expression with two subthemes, *enduring the process of looking inward to find truth* and *expressing truth in safe spaces as a practice of wellness*.

In this chapter, I present implications and recommendations based on the results of my study. Further, I provide an outlook on the use of storytelling and creative expression as modes of inquiry that can help facilitate critical discussions related to social (in)justices, education, and understanding the experiences of Black women. More specifically, I propose the need for future research that evokes a critical response to the impact of the social injustice pandemic that continues to perpetuate the call for social change in the counselor education profession.

Interpretation of the Findings

Evocative forms of autoethnography are common for use in studies that inspire to facilitate discourse around issues like systemic oppression and health determinants for

Black people and other people of color. Further, my study included an interweaving of experiences with several intersecting identities that impacted my perspective at the juncture of spirituality, (un)wellness, and social justice using events that occurred during my time in a CES doctoral program. In addition, in consideration of the tenets of EF and its emphasis on connected and collective experiences, cultural identity, and (re)claiming identity, in my data analysis process, I closely examined the inclusion of definitions of strength that display a variety of expressions of self-expressed identity that has shown up in different ways throughout generations in my family. Stemming from the data, I summarized my endarkened interpretations from the CTs by connecting the tales back to my EF conceptual and theoretical framework. Then, I revisited key findings from the literature, including how these reflected upon my research findings.

Interpreting Tales Through an Endarkened Lens

I incorporated aspects of my endarkened theoretical and conceptual framework throughout the CTs. Particularly, I incorporated the theoretical tenets of self-definition, recognition of the sovereignty of Black women telling their own stories, and the inclusion of spiritual practices for healing from oppressive systems that continue to create pain for Black women living in the United States (Dillard, 2000, 2012). Endarkened feminists understand the cultural meaning making often derived from a sense of spirituality for Black women. Throughout my tales, I interpret through a lens of a young Black girl who grew into a Black woman who feared that assertiveness labeled as anger was bad and thus contended with my faith in various settings. I interwove tales of my observations of

justice and recognition of spirituality being linked to justice, whereas oftentimes I began to view these two as separate from one another.

Another interpretation that I derived from an endarkened lens was (re)membering connections to my cultural identity and connectedness to the women in my family who modeled aspects of identity far before I was faced with assembling myself into who I am today (Dillard, 2000, 2012). My interpretations of the storyteller interviews with Black women in my family assisted in my interpretations of the tales, recognizing aspects of their storytelling that I conveyed in the narratives. At the end of each part of the *Critical Tales Series*, I shared critical tale realizations for additional layers of interpretations for the reader to consider. I used these realizations to provide context to the tales and to highlight aspects from my theoretical and conceptual framework that the reader may find in the tales.

Interpreting Internalized Stereotypes and (Un)Wellness

In Chapter 2, I reviewed literature that discussed psychological, emotional, and physical unwellness associated with stereotypical tropes for Black women. My results support the research regarding my internalization of messages from childhood and education that endorsed strength, demonized anger, and culminated in unrealistic pressure to perform in academia. For generational context, both storytellers endorsed attributes of the SBW schema. For instance, Vessa's interview reinforced the awareness of the Sapphire trope, which may cause Black women to avoid assertiveness in apprehension of received accusations of being "aggressive, controlling, or manipulative" (Bell, 1992; Thomas et al., 2004, p. 429). I saw instances of my own hyperawareness of this trope in

my tales as I recounted times where I was watchful of my words and tone for fear of being seen as the ABW. In contrast, Anastasia did not endorse an awareness of being seen as angry, but rather endorsed stories of strength and resilience as modeled by her mother and grandmother. When I considered the findings of generational wisdom, it appears that strength is closely linked to assertiveness as an expression of advocacy.

Voicing and Self-Concealment

My interpretation of the results expounded on my understanding of fragmentation and recognition of toggling between self-concealment and voicing. I examined the aspects of voicing and self-silencing through the lens of my CTs and from the storyteller interviews. I found similarities with my experiences of navigating social mobility while trying to maintain wellness and wholeness of self. Self-definition was a prominent discovery that surfaced at several points in the storyteller interviews. Throughout writing the CTs and in several segments of the tales, there is a presence of self-silencing and appeasing behavior.

Woods-Giscombé et al. (2016) described these types of experiences as self-concealment, which is a characteristic of Black women's attempt to be strong that can result in harmful self-identity and harmful internalized beliefs towards self. In my CTs, I shared several stories of the internal gaze of speaking up against injustice and a glimpse into a few experiences that led to my self-silencing in certain spaces. The result of holding in emotions that I had internalized as bad, and my process of telling the truth in all the spaces I occupied was a healing aspect of this study. I found solace in my anger instead of being afraid of it. The anger does not define me, and I was able to articulate

this as one of my many human characteristics that I should freely express in safety. I fell into these internalized tropes throughout my doctoral journey—refusing to be just good *for a Black student*—and I was fighting an invisible battle against oppression and found myself achieving my goals while unwell more times than not.

Further, when I mapped these experiences against Geyton et al.'s (2020) findings on social mobility and internalized identity, my results were consistent with the experiences shared in my CTs. Particularly, my attempts to piece myself back together again through finding my voice and (re)learning to express my cultural identity in predominantly white spaces. Further, in consideration of the complexity of identity of multiply-minoritized individuals, I found I often engaged in a back-and-forth navigation through identities to adapt to various settings that are often modeled and learned from early ages. Thus, my realization of occupying multiple spaces where I do not always feel safe enough to express myself led to finding these expressive writing and voicing practices as a prominent part of my wellness plan.

Interpreting Academic Presence and (Un)Wellness

The studies I reviewed in Chapter 2 demonstrated an understanding of the unique challenges facing Black women, particularly in academic spaces. These challenges can contribute to physical and mental health unwellness (Bernard et al., 2017; Erving, 2018) and can be exacerbated by internalization of identity tropes like the EBW (Dickens et al., 2018; Domingue, 2015; Evans-Winters, 2019). Research also reflected issues of lack of representation of Black faculty or misrepresentation of Black students that reinforces oppressive stereotypes are linked as causes of negative experiences of Black women

during their studies (Acosta, 2019; Acuff, 2018; Dickens et al., 2018). Evans-Winters (2019) discussed tokenism and intellectual migrations where Black women succumb to beliefs of sacrificing their own needs for wellness to advance and succeed in academic settings. Geyton et al. (2020) noted the passages of social mobility that Black women feel relegated to pass through to attain success in academic spaces.

In my study, I found that my internalization of experiences of tokenism, enduring pain, or processing discrimination (experienced directly or indirectly) were at times invalidated when voiced in predominantly white settings and subsequently led to unhealthy suppression of health issues. In the critical tale, "*Missing the mark*" I recount an example of mental anguish I endured due to a misperception of not making mistakes, and particularly mistakes that I viewed as keeping me from the proverbial table of academic pursuits.

Who Is the Educated Black Woman?

In Chapter 2, I discussed how the EBW stereotype carries similar characteristics of the ABW and strong Black woman tropes, and as such is positioned uniquely within the frame of my study. For my study, it was necessary for me to explore the inner workings of internalized stereotypes like EBW, as it pertained to academic presence. Domingue (2015) found that Black women endorsed specific characteristics of the EBW stereotypical trope when in academic settings such as voicing and silencing. Voicing depicted the ways in which Black women would experience expressing their thoughts, beliefs, and opinions, and silencing represented times when Black women felt discouraged from sharing their experiences (Domingue, 2015).

Many of the beliefs noted by Evans-Winters (2019) and Geyton et al. (2020) are echoed in similar scholarship that addresses the EBW trope perception of self and emphasizes the need Black women have for connection while also feeling unwelcomed in academic spaces (Domingue, 2015; Porter et al., 2020; Shavers and Moore, 2019). Over time, these types of beliefs can manifest in devastating ways that impact health (Balkin, 2017; Geyton et al., 2020; Evans-Winters, 2019).

When I think of my achievements within education, my findings directly link to my self-definition and reveal aspects of my professional identity that may have been influenced by my belief about who I am as a Black woman. While I can identify with the resilience in these characteristics, in my story, I also see how this perspective of perfection may have contributed to my sensitivity to others' perception of me as a Black woman in academic settings that causes me to hold experiences inside and not engage in protecting myself with boundaries or self-expression.

Belonging and (Mis)Representation

In my study, the CTs each conveyed an aspect of my journey through education, primarily focusing on my experiences in a counselor education doctoral program. A prominent component found in literature that was also confirmed in my study was the experiences of neglectful and harmful environments that minimize or reinforce systems of oppression that exist in academic spaces. A lack of cultural representation and misrepresentation of Black women within these spaces can perpetuate harm or isolate Black women (Acosta, 2019; Peters & Miles Nash, 2021). Peters and Miles Nash (2021) described the vast experience that Black women have with enduring predominantly white

spaces, particularly in educational settings. Subsequently, Peters and Miles Nash (2021) contributed to frameworks on intersectional leadership that acknowledges the presence that Black women have in institutions, like education, that are often engulfed in systemic oppression.

The research I reviewed echoed the need for connective interactions or safe spaces to process experiences of oppression and discrimination. In academic settings this can come in the form of mentorship. Domingue's (2015) research suggested ways to support Black women college students such as mentorship and cultural affinity spaces. Further, Porter et al. (2020) addressed the concept of connectedness and academic presence when exploring the relationship between Black women and identity development during undergraduate study. Porter et al. (2020) described the use of organic group settings, like sister circles (or *sista circles*) rather than individual interviews when studying phenomena related to Black women's lived experiences. Furthermore, Porter et al. (2020) reported, "Black women come to know through lived experiences, through an intersectional lens, and by dialoguing with other Black women" (p. 257).

My study addressed belonging and (mis)representation in specific ways meant to highlight my internal experiences of belonging and feeling misrepresented, as well as incorporating a Black woman, Dr. Naomi, as my fictional therapist central to facilitating the storytelling aspects of my autoethnography. The primary reason for creating this role was to increase the cultural representation of Black women in my story. While I have had many mentors throughout my educational journey of various races, a central aspect of my tales is the lack of representation I saw of Black women in higher education and as

professors in my doctoral program. Fictionalizing Dr. Naomi allowed me to insert a Black woman's influence as an amalgam of allies that I have had throughout my studies. Her education represents the collective wisdom in honor of all Black women have contributed to civil and human rights whether degreed or not degreed, I work from the uncton that they would have doctoral degrees ten times over.

Additionally, fictionalizing a Black woman as my therapist also represented the span of time where I was not in therapy or was in therapy with White women counselors where at times, I did not always feel safe enough to unveil my anger and rage I was experiencing during the events I described in the tales. Thus, my intentionality here is used to highlight the need of culturally responsive counselors who are ready to hear the true stories without minimizing or placating that I needed to be well and to heal. Lastly, the setting of a counseling environment allowed for critical exploration of aspects of identity that are sometimes overlooked in counseling conceptualization, particularly as it comes to spirituality as a resource and recognizing toxic spirituality as a method of oppression.

Enduring Pain

When I processed through the tales in Part I, I was drawn into understanding the process of enduring. Enduring as in a form of resilience that is not often chosen by the marginalized, that affords a limited amount of energy, often at others benefit, to appease, to educate, and to placate others. The experiences in the tales speak back to social hypervisibility that I addressed in Chapter 2. Namely, the weightiness of responsibility that Black women who possess internalized stereotypes may engage in unwillingly

particularly when in academic settings as a means of survival and to avoid further harm in unsafe spaces.

The internalization of stereotypes that reinforce this type of mental endurance often carries negative outcomes for overall well-being. Erving (2018) described the higher prevalence of physical–psychological comorbidity for Black women, which indicates a need to explore the experiences of Black women to understand themes that contribute to these health issues. Furthermore, Black women’s internalization of strength may contribute to the ongoing social disparities that occur in medical treatment experiences of Black women, thus reinforcing the perception that medical professionals may hold that Black women have superhuman strength. Piccardi et al. (2018) reviewed studies of social disparities and reported results that illuminate misdiagnoses, undertreatment, and other errors related to medical care for Black patients.

Interpreting CES Professional Identity and (Un)Wellness

The literature I presented in Chapter 2 discussed the various experiences with systemic oppression that Black women recounted in various predominantly white spaces. Further, these experiences did not seem to relieve Black women of the implied duty to be leaders within social justice movements, social advocacy, and leadership roles that aim towards diversity and inclusion (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018; Peters & Miles Nash, 2021). Research that addressed leadership and advocacy roles warrant attention for further exploration of the mental, physical, and spiritual impact of assuming these roles, especially for Black women in CES programs that emphasize leadership and advocacy identity (Kaduvettoor, 2009; Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018). More specifically, the

leadership and advocacy domain within the CES profession situates scholars in a position primed to research issues that impact positive social change with intentionality in approaches developed with Afrocentric and feminist tenets (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018; Peters & Miles Nash, 2021).

Nelson et al. (2016) explored the wellness of Black women in doctoral programs and their research findings were a guide for my research informing my study's exploration of ISI like EBW. My study explored the experiences of myself as researcher and participant to decipher the impact on my professional identity when held alongside these internalized beliefs. Throughout my study, I was particularly interested in retrieving implications from existing literature that addressed ethical and professional standards that would improve the experiences of Black women in doctoral programs. For instance, I found I had an internal battle of what justice looked like – whether it was speaking up or being quiet in the face of discrimination.

The internalization of witnessing women in my family speak up against injustice, coupled with my internalized belief about how impolite it was to be angry stirred a turmoil within me that led to unwellness. It was when I found spaces to express myself freely and creatively, that I could begin to recognize how trying to avoid the ABW label was directly opposed to my belief in justice and wellness. Even so, I can see throughout my lineage, there is a generational link to finding joy in justice and self-expression. Contrarily, my findings also demonstrate a layered perspective of how easily this love for social justice advocacy can turn into obligation and advocacy burden when combined with tropes of strength and resilience.

Leadership and Advocacy for Counselor Educators

In many ways, these tales were particularly hard to write because I had to recognize the ways I have been at war within myself and how that has manifested in physical and psychological harm. I had to contend with the allure of the strong Black woman stereotype and recognize how internalizing these tropes are in complete opposition of advocacy. I used the Dr. Naomi character as a fictive safe place throughout my tales as she represented several Black women who have been advocates for wellness and self-care.

Lamar and Helm (2017) studied researcher identity amongst counselor education and supervision doctoral students and found a common issue that was reported was balancing the various roles related to professional identity, particularly, role as researcher. More specifically, Lamar and Helm's findings indicated that their participants described difficulty with integrating their researcher identity with their other identities. Further, one participant noted a desire for more reflexive engagement to aid in professional growth in research identity (2017). These insights were applicable to aspects of my study related to the complexity of an individual's identity and the further difficulties that may arise for counselor education doctoral students who often juggle roles within the five domains.

For instance, in Chapter 4 I shared an excerpt from a critical tale depicting the internal process of feeling obligated to help non-BIPOC people learn about microaggressions using my lived experiences. Black people are often called upon to share their experiences of oppression in predominantly white settings in what Jagers (2020)

call “fake inclusion”. The overreliance on personal accounts may not always seem optional and at the bequest of educating our White peers, Black people may feel that doing so will help move towards change. However, researchers show that these experiences can be emotionally taxing (Acuff, 2018; Dickens et al., 2019; Jagers, 2020; Porter et al., 2020). This is where hypervisibility in white spaces becomes exhausting and can lead to identity shifting (Dickens et al., 2019). Further, my realizations from writing the CTs supported endorsements of anger related to advocacy (or lack thereof) and ties into the research about the EBW, particularly related to advocacy. These findings are critical to understanding how many aspects of the counselor educator identity of advocacy may reinforce negative aspects of the EBW trope that can be internalized.

Another interpretation of this critical tale is how it relates to concepts of negotiating social mobility with (un)safe spaces for Black women in academia. For instance, in addition to understanding Black women’s motivation for social mobility, Geyton et al. (2020) described three routes that Black women take in academic spaces including voicing, exiting, and passing. Geyton et al. described voicing as Black women “attempting to redefine the current social group,” whereas both exiting and passing involved Black women’s “attempts at joining another social group” (2020, p. 4). The experience of not fitting in and the drive to find culturally safe spaces was a prominent theme that emerged in my study and thus reflected in my interpretation of my navigation through multiple spaces as told in my CTs.

Spirituality, Joy, and Advocacy Through Generations

Evans-Winters (2019) described the interconnectedness between spirituality and social advocacy for Black women. More specifically, Evans-Winters described how storytelling amongst generations has historical roots as a spiritual practice that aided families in fighting and coping with oppression. Part of the exhaustion I discovered through my review of the data seemed to be from the recognition of oppressive systems and the demands of remaining strong, being resilient, and having vulnerable emotions minimized and congruent responses to conflict overexaggerated to fit stereotypes of identity. In many ways, minimization of vulnerability and over-exaggeration of negatively viewed emotions can be internalized and thus making the need for culturally sensitive and culturally responsive counselor education and training essential for professionals who work with Black women.

In my tales I told the stories related to the context of my study. I also trickle in my aspect of joy, which is expressed through creative writing and truth telling. Perhaps a ploy to escape certain realities, but in its core, it has served me through some truly troubling times. There is no way I can imagine enduring and sustaining wellness in doing the work of a counselor educator – as a Black woman in America – without protecting and expressing my joy. Joy is self-defined – for me, it's deeply spiritual and embodied in the witness of my grandmother's life. Joy is also my mother's expression of passion to step in when educators were discriminating against her kids. Joy is also in the way I take in what is happening to me and place into writing, singing, or dancing.

Throughout that process of writing, telling, re-writing, and re-telling, I found that the threads that endured time after time, were the results that connected spirituality with justice and advocacy. This revelation was perhaps the most steadying aspect of my findings. I have found great joy in seeing how advocacy is such a deep part of my family lineage and that it accounts for wealth of understanding of the joy that I have stored within that can be used for wellness and advocacy. A greater joy was sharing these results with my storytellers to witness the healing that allowed us to see advocacy as expressions of spirituality.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations considered in this study was the use of memory as the main source of data. However, this limitation was mitigated by including multiple data sources to (re)member. Additionally, I evaluated the various pitfalls of conducting an autoethnography, including the ethical issues, and these concerns were mitigated throughout the iterative process through consulting with committee and the literature on autoethnography as guides. One example is the ethical issue of protecting people who may be implicated by the autoethnographic stories. One way I addressed this in my study was by using pseudonyms, redacting identifiable information from artifacts, and by using fictional settings and changing details of scenes within the CTs.

In consideration of the delimitations (or boundaries of inquiry) for this study, I am reminded of the many scholars who have forged a pathway for this methodology who have tested the bounds and engaged in intentional departures from traditional methods. I attended a distinguished lecture from Dr. Boylorn and asked her, *'how do you determine*

which stories to tell?' She encouraged me to keep the entire scope of my scholarly work in focus and to remember longevity with doing in-depth, intimate work like autoethnography (personal communication, R. Boylorn, April 14, 2022). After this conversation, I realized that the vast array of stories I wrote are a part of a much larger story that could not possibly be contained fully in one study. Many of the narratives I presented are still unfolding and in pursuit of honor and truth, I followed Dr. Boylorn's advice as I sorted, revised, and eventually selected the CTs for this study. As such, I note my process of selecting and deselecting tales that I would share in this study as a boundary of inquiry and not a limitation.

A boundary of my study to acknowledge is the limited presence of the storytellers throughout the (re)presentation of results and the interpretation of my study. In Chapter 3, I described the focused intention for including storytellers in my critical autoethnography, particularly to help address the research sub-question and inform my memory related to my research topic. However, autoethnography is most often conducted with a sole subject of study, therefore, the inclusion of additional participants introduced a challenge that I assessed throughout this process. More specifically, as I analyzed the results of the storyteller interviews, I had to be careful to return to the internal gaze so I could remain within the scope of my proposed study. I note this as a boundary of study rather than a limitation as the choice to reduce the (re)presentation of the storytellers' experiences was intentional and a part of my iterative research process. Later in this chapter, I expound on recommendations for future research that could reach beyond my study's scope and

further explore the layered accounts of multiple Black women's experiences within a generational context.

Another limitation of my study was the use of creative writing as a method and primary data source. Though I noted in Chapter 4 my use of various solicited critiques, I would be wise to note that I am not a writer by profession and as such, there are limitations in how my data was presented in narratives that is worth scrutiny. Issues that can arise with narratives can be the way in which the stories are told are largely shaped by the writer, in this case, myself and can often rely on literary devices that deviate from the sincerity of the story (Kim, 2015). I used various data sources to justify the components included in the CTs, however, I did employ the use of literary devices for transitions used to provide setting and context for the details of the stories.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations I suggest in continuation of positive social change that stems from my research study. The exploration of ISI and academic presence are both important for counselor educators to consider their role in encountering Black women who are counselors-in training, supervisees, faculty, and researchers who may resemble attributes of the EBW. Understanding more about the aspects of (un)wellness that is often reinforced by internalized stereotypes could provide a guide for understanding how the stereotypes of EBW manifests externally.

Particularly, considering the interconnectedness of each of the concepts, future research could choose to isolate any of these concepts to explore in depth the experiences of Black women in settings outside of academia or within more broad doctoral

experience across disciplines. My study could be replicated in different disciplines to consider the ways stereotypical tropes may translate to different professional settings. Future research could explore the impact of professional identities across similar fields like social work, psychology, or across interdisciplinary fields where Black women hold leadership and advocacy roles.

Another specific consideration for future research is to closely examine the generational complexities that exist in the development, endorsement, and manifestations of stereotypes throughout generational perspectives. While I incorporated data from storytellers on my mother's side of the family to address my research sub-question, the scope of my study as a critical autoethnography narrowed the storyteller contributions to supporting my retelling of my internalized experiences from my perspective. Another study could delve more deeply into the stories of several generations of family to understand the way that stereotypes are reinforced or disrupted in this context.

Additionally, my study was narrowed regarding procedures of storytelling in one-on-one interactions (i.e., storyteller interviews) or in my voicing of the tales which was conducted using dictation, sharing, or voice memos. Therefore, another recommendation for future research could be an expansion from one story-telling setting to inclusion of storytelling in a group-like setting (i.e., Sista Circle) to examine more closely the mechanisms, features, and experiences of participating in spaces designed to cultivate wellness for Black women.

Similarly, the use of culturally congruent methods of inquiry should be expounded upon, through use of diverse scholarship that de-centers Eurocentrism and

incorporates the expanse of knowledge of Black and Indigenous peoples' meaning making and culturally-resonate epistemologies. Further, counselor educators and researchers must consider the impact of the deficit of exposure to diverse scholars on their minoritized student population. Future research could examine the impact on wellness of graduate students who engage in a curriculum that infuses different cultural perspectives in the main course texts as compared to students who use the canon of White CIS-male scholars.

There were several dimensions of identity explored within my study which resonated with the layered accounts found in research about Black women. Further proving that Black women are not a monolith and further, that there are complexities of understanding the intersectional cultural identities before truly exploring ways to support Black women effectively. A recommendation for the field of counselor education is to explore the nuances of internalized beliefs of Black women in CES to consider the ways in which advocacy are closely aligned with personal identity. Further, examining the ways the CES professional identity promotes congruence and wellness, or the ways in which the professional identity are aligned with negative tropes that create unwellness. Similarly, another recommendation from my study would be further exploration of internalization of stereotypes and an in-depth study of its impact on each aspect of wellness: spiritual, physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual. My study focused on spiritual and psychological impact of internalization, with some indication of other domains. Each domain of wellness is worth exploring on its own to further research into promoting holistic health.

Finally, in consideration of how the CES profession can offer support that rejects stereotypes of identity, future research should focus on how the leadership and advocacy part of the CES professional identity aligns with issues of social injustice. There are many ways to approach these types of studies, but perhaps an intentional approach to research that would center Black scholarship and theoretical frameworks could help to promote culturally sensitive and culturally responsive methodologies and praxis. Additionally, more research in this area could highlight the need for promoting Black authors in research and theory classes, which is necessary for expanding the accessibility of these onto-epistemologies for students from underrepresented populations.

Implications

The implications for this study create opportunity for necessary dialogue about experiences of Black women in education, particularly, higher education and the role that ISI has on facilitating circumstances of unwellness that reinforce attributes of strength that are unattainable and dehumanizing. The use of EF as the theoretical framework and critical autoethnography allowed for exploration into insider's knowledge of cultural context which helped me describe aspects of phenomena that impact Black women in higher education. I end this section with four implications for: (a) disrupting stereotypical tropes of unwellness; (b) becoming social justice-oriented counselor educators; (c) endarkening wellness and wholeness practices for Black women; and (d) embracing new methods. These implications offer insight into practical action steps as well as thoughtful considerations for moving the field of counselor education forward.

Disrupting Stereotypical Tropes of Unwellness

The results of my study reiterated the presence of the stereotypical tropes strength, unwellness, and silencing held by Black women across generations that overtime can be internalized. Thus, my study increased awareness of the need to intentionally disrupt harmful narratives, externally and internally. Understanding how internalizations impact Black women's experiences in higher education can lead to the development of supportive interventions that curate wholeness of self-identity, reject identity fragmentation and self-silencing, recognize the importance of belonging and cultural representation, facilitate creativity and inclusivity of spirituality, and encourage narratives of endarkened joy that center wellness as necessities towards social change advocacy. I often wonder if when those impacted by violent acts and hate crimes come into a counseling office, if they will always need to request a counselor from their background or if there will be a day when their culturally sensitive and responsive treatment needs can be met by any trained counselor they encounter.

Helping the Resilient Helpers

A part of disrupting stereotypical tropes of unwellness is recognizing the systemic ways that Black women are conditioned to dismiss their own pain. In *Part III: (Re)moving the veil of strength*, I shared several short tales that depicted the ways in which I had internalized the message of my pain not warranting a response. An important implication from these tales is reconstructing how we define who needs help and who does not need help. For example, in Chapter 4 I discussed my rationale for fictionalizing

my therapist in the CTs. The reality is that I have seen three White women as therapists prior to the therapist I have now, none of which ever identified my struggles with anxiety.

Thus, with these perceptions being internalized, I, myself, as a practicing counselor was not able to see how destabilizing my anxiety was beneath my own perceptions of strength and resilience. Compounded by how the extra layers of the witnessing Black trauma articulated through #BlackLivesMatter hashtags, my untreated mental health was often minimized or overlooked in my treatment. Therefore, another implication I derived from my study is the need for increased cultural sensitivity and responsiveness to the nuances of exploring the mental wellness treatment for Black women. Understanding how messages of strength and resilience are being conveyed by mental health professionals is paramount to taking steps forward.

Becoming Social Justice Oriented Counselor Educators

One specific implication for future research is to explore the social justice identity of a counselor educator and examine how that is enacted in every other facet of the counselor educator identity. My study focused on educational settings where social (in)justice prevailed and juxtaposed those experiences with clashes of identity. Much of my experiences were shaped by having an unbalanced idea of who the holders (and gatekeepers) of knowledge are. If counselor educators, specifically those who are coming from backgrounds who have endured injustice in education, then facilitating and encouraging dialogue about counselor educator's individual journeys can directly impact how they teach, research, supervise, and advocate for counselors-in-training and for the counseling profession.

Leadership and advocacy are meaningless titles held by a counselor educator if the title is not synonymous with social justice advocacy. It becomes imperative that the social justice-oriented counselor educator has a personal reckoning with oneself to identify and disrupt harmful narratives that exist within education and scholarship. Particularly, the approaches to research that are not inclusive of cultural identity, and furthermore, those types of approaches that would cause incongruence and disharmony for Black women and women of color.

Citing Black Women

As counselor education programs embrace diversity in practice and mission – there is also a need for inclusivity of a range of research methodologies that are reflective of this diversity. I was fortunate to have support from my committee and program to explore theorists outside of the white-dominant canon of individuals. Even so, I must note that I had to dive into texts by scholars of color that I was not exposed to throughout my entire doctoral program. Understanding the importance of representation in literature and resources is one direct response to engaging with this study.

I was intentional throughout this dissertation with citing Black women. This was a challenge at times as most of the Black women I cited had authored books and may not have been visibly present in journal articles. Often peer-reviewed journal articles are preferred for dissertations, so I had discussions with my committee to allow for more authored books that were relevant to my topic. This erasure of Black women from scholarship due to barriers to publication from hierarchical and oppressive practices, like citation politics, keep BIPOC scholars hidden, and creates obstacles for introducing rich,

in-depth literature and scholarship on diverse topics (Mott & Cockayne, 2017). This is detrimental to all students as texts from diverse authors often offer critical challenges for perspective taking and introspection that causes the researcher to delve deeper into their motivation for query, their identity, and the terrains they navigate within those identities.

Throughout my process, I was attentive to include Black women scholars to ground and fortify my study. This was a healing journey for me. Figure 12 is an excerpt from my acknowledgements where I paid homage to the Black women who made this study possible for me.

Figure 12

Excerpt from Acknowledgments

Black Women and Women of Color Scholars – When I started in the direction of autoethnography, I let myself wonder – *is there a Black woman who does autoethnography?* To my delight, I found Robin Boylorn, a Black woman, and a force within the field of autoethnography for her contributions to critical autoethnography and her creation of *Blackgirl autoethnography*. And the list of inspiration continues. Cynthia Dillard’s *endarkened feminism* anchored my study. Keondria McClish-Boyd and Kakali Bhattacharya’s *endarkened narrative inquiry* and Stephanie Toliver’s *endarkened storywork & Afrofuturism* inspired my return to storytelling. My work has found a safe space to explore because of these brilliant scholars (*and those before them*) accepted the call to be heard and seen and for that, I am eternally grateful.

Personally, I could not and *did not* believe that White scholars were the only holders of knowledge. Once I found scholars who represented aspects of my cultural identity, I needed academic freedom to explore a deeply cultural and rich roots of knowledge, supported by literature of diverse authors. I would hope other counselor education programs could consider the mantle we hold regarding social change – in a time where the collision of identity is occurring in many spaces, I hope we are ready to train

counselor educators who promote healing and do not repeat patterns of harm within academic spaces.

There are many ways to respond to this action step, but it will take those in position of power to act. The onus of diversifying and decolonizing literature used within counselor education should not fall on the students. There must be intentionality in introducing diverse scholarship throughout the curriculum that deviates from these texts being othered as “optional readings,” as this sends a poignant and counterintuitive message.

Endarkening Wellness and Wholeness Practices for Black Women

Further, I propose a move towards wellness practices and supportive interventions be created and resourced for Black women and other multiply-minoritized populations in doctoral programs that help Black women explore their cultural identity as a part of professional identity development. These initiatives and programs should be well-funded and incorporate spiritual and indigenous practices of wholeness and healing, which may at times may mean contracting cultural insiders to teach on these topics.

Cultivating Wellness by Funding Mentorship Initiatives

I found solace in returning to creative expressions to engage myself in this process of (re)membering, and as such a return to an internal gaze of self was paramount to the depth of work that I uncovered. Black women and women of color could benefit from having intentional support to walk through these types of rigorous journeys. I was fortunate to find Black women, women of color, and indigenous women scholars who walked alongside me to support this work; many who have paved a way for me and who

are well-published in the areas of critical autoethnography, endarkened narrative inquiry, and autoethnography.

Financially, I was also fortunate to have fellowship funds available to pay for specific mentorship programs that afforded me access to mentorship and guidance from women of color who commissioned my desire to generate a study that immersed me in exploration of my cultural identity. My hope would be that mentorship programs could be created or funded to support Black women who may find themselves internalizing stereotypes that are creating harm to their wellness. I mention funding because often the temptation for PWIs is to burden other Black women or women of color to create and sustain mentorship programs with no funding support. This is an extra load for many Black women to bear, as discussed earlier in this chapter regarding advocacy. Allied support shows up in many ways – the direct call to action here is for funding to be allocated to support these initiatives, whether that is paying internal scholars of color or outsourcing beyond the organization.

Cultivating Wellness in Curated Safe Spaces

As I near completion of this doctoral degree, I attribute my reckoning with my (un)wellness to these supportive spaces. From these experiences, I found that wellness comes with congruence and wholeness in identity. Congruence can be practiced by understanding what cultivates a safe space for Black women to express themselves in the full range of emotions. Particularly, for Black women pursuing academia, I would propose allied support to construct spaces like *sista circles*, where Black women can

gather and share experiences and help disrupt the stereotypical tropes that may hinder overall wellness.

During my time in my doctoral program, I helped co-curate a sister circle for Black women in my CES program, called *Tapestry: Sister Circle*, where these conversations are shared in a sacred space (the sister circle). Even as I served as the inaugural President, helping initiate the process to being recognized as a student organization, I have felt supported to confront my self-perceptions of strength while serving. These spaces take time to cultivate an atmosphere of safety before people feel free to share openly about their struggles. This must be considered when setting up these spaces.

More plainly, recognizing the need for time to develop these spaces in a trauma-informed, caring way. However, an immediate action step of counselor education programs would be to provide allied support for creation of these spaces, to visibly acknowledge their existence through promotion, and to designate practices internally that emphasize resource sharing to eliminate barriers (i.e., financial resources, emotional labor).

Cultivating Wellness Through Creativity

There are many aspects to the retelling of these tales that revealed the gradual fragmentation of my identity over time. Culminating in various forms of unwellness, there was a link to my identity in education that was found in my results. Particularly, Shillingford et al. (2013) described wellness for counselor educators as including elements like spirituality, setting boundaries, and developing professional identity.

Particularly captivating and useful for my study was the introspection I encountered through defining wellness for myself. First, I had to begin with a search and (re)collection of times I was unwell before I could pursue a working definition of wellness. As an extension to the literature, my CTs revealed the prevalence of internalized messages of strength, self-silencing, and code-switching that breeds more harmful habits and behaviors that reinforce neglect of self to be strong or resilient (Griffin, 2016; West et al., 2016).

The importance of creative expression for my cultural identity is infused throughout my study. The conflict I encountered often dealt with the internal struggle that caused me to minimize my voice and my expressions in predominantly white spaces. After reviewing my data for this study, I recognized the back-and-forth process of negotiating identity based on settings, which illuminated the internalized beliefs of identity that at times stifled self-expression to my detriment. Thus, expressing the fullness of my identity was at times in direct conflict with my internalization of being a strong, angry, and educated Black woman. This illuminates another implication for consideration – the places where Black women are allowed to express themselves in writing or speech and be heard without retaliation. This place may not exist yet, but a practical consideration for counselor educator programs is to introduce expressive art pedagogies within curriculum or extracurricular activities during doctoral studies that Black women and other marginalized students may benefit from as they are navigating the development of their professional identity.

In Appendix F, I have included examples of poetry written throughout my doctoral journey and specifically during this research process to illustrate how my process of writing has helped me voice the inexplorable. Poetry has been one form of re-engaging with merging each aspect of myself with the world around me. The premise of endarkened joy as practice – spiritual depth of cultural congruence, truth telling, creativity, and engaging in sacred spaces where Black women find one another in wellness. While not a focus of my study, I have been blessed to have many spaces I feel welcomed to practice caring for myself, expressing myself, and engaging with women focused on disrupting harmful messages fueled by misogynoir, white supremacy, and institutionalized oppression. Many of these safe spaces are listed in my acknowledgements.

Cultivating Wholeness with Endarkened Joy

Endarkened joy is a phrase I have created throughout this process that was inspired by Dillard's joyful resistance (2012, 2019). Joyful resistance is described as an approach to social justice advocacy that centers wellness and spirituality for Black women (Dillard, 2012, 2019). For me, joy represents a deep well of internal resources that are unseen and cannot be tampered with by external circumstances. It is a spiritual belief – that I have what I need to sustain me – and thus can pull from within what is needed to move ahead. Building from the creativity and political components that allow Black women to self-define how they practice spirituality, then, becomes essential to spirituality being useful as a wellness practice. Therefore, *endarkened joy* is in essence a practice of wellness that centers cultural identity in spirituality and creativity.

A part of the process for me was recognizing the aspects of these harmful tropes that I had internalized and that were being challenged in the wake of all the events of 2020. The CTs I shared are a culmination of the events and the beginning of my process of wellness towards voicing my pain and embracing all parts of myself in various settings where I had once tried to minimize to fit in. It is important to note that while spirituality is often seen as very separate from education, there are many similar systemic structures that perpetuate harm and toxicity against Black women. Especially Black women who speak up.

Dillard's (2012; 2021) conceptualization of spirituality has credited Hull & Hull's (2001) definition of a *new spirituality* for African American women which includes (a) spiritual consciousness, (b) politics, and (c) creativity. Though, not generalizable, this exploration blends into the discussion of intersectionality related to Black women's role in spiritual spaces, social justice efforts, and thus shows up within the EBW trope in ways that reemphasize resilience in ways that do not support wellness. There were many stories I wrote as a part of this process and ultimately had to ween them down for the purpose and scope of this study. I focused on capturing the events that sparked me into writing for wellness and finding my voice through scholarly expression, and that has led to a type of joy that I did not think was possible for completing a dissertation study.

One central thread of my spiritual identity was first introduced in the *(Re)Membering Gay-Gay* critical narrative presented at the beginning of this study. Throughout this dissertation I shared parts of my process and how it relates to the spiritual practice of *sankofa* – *(re)membering the past to bring to the present what is*

necessary to move forward. Part of my rationale for using process coding during analysis was to capture the active state of this process. None of my story is complete and my hope is that those who engage with my study will find an active component to take hold of for their own growth and healing. I have come to find joy in the research process that I believe was possible through aligning with a research methodology that encouraged reflexivity and creativity and supported rootedness in culturally congruent research practices.

Embracing New Methods

I end each chapter in this dissertation with an Audre Lorde quote to resonate in contrast with the stark absence of Black women found in peer-reviewed literature and research. One quote that I used in Chapter 3 from Lorde particularly encompasses my sentiments for conducting a critical autoethnography and states, “*For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.*” This sentiment is deeply held within the methodology of this study. We are living in a time where oppressive violence is surrounding minoritized communities, and we cannot afford to continue to white-wash training for our future counselors to skirt around these issues. It is time to be honest about the origins of research, education, and other systemic structures that guide the counselor education field. Too often, the systems we base our counseling practices upon were not built with equality or dignity in mind.

This is my invitation to the reader, to consider how to engage or re-engage with the education system in sincerity in a way that leads to action towards social change.

A Joyful Sankofa – Call to Action

The title of Chapter 5 intentionally deviates from Dillard's (2021) (re)claiming part of (re)membering to forecast my proposition for re-engagement in discussions with counselor education. Re-engaging with academia represents returning to knowledge in academic spaces, while acknowledging that knowledge has existed in my family longer than my presence into academic spaces. Throughout the CTs, I explored the internalization of identity related to Black womanhood that revealed interconnectedness with community, spirituality, wellness practices, and commitment to social justice advocacy. EF outlined the power of cultural identity for African American women and illuminated the need for Black women to engage in self-definition (Collins, 2016; Dillard, 2012).

Addressing the issue of diversity in the way we learn about research could help expand the knowledge base of wellness practices. In these practices, U.S. scholars must confront their history of oppression and be honest about the ways that has infiltrated how we research and probe others for our benefit. Out of wellness, there will be an increased notion of ethics that comes from a historical, ancestral knowing that can rebuild trust between the researcher and the researched. Considering my experiences with hostile and harmful educational environments that at some point blended with the life events I was encountering living as a Black woman in America, re-engaging with counselor educators was more apropos for the conversations I hope my dissertation initiates.

Looking back on this entire study, I found great comfort in the salience of the results and implications for what we as counselor educators must be willing to address

head-on to ensure that our counselor educators, counselors, and advocates are well. Out of all fields of study, I call on counselor education to get active in their responsiveness. Though this journey has been personally liberating in many ways, my hope for this study is to spark necessary conversations regarding wellness of Black women in counselor education. Further, findings of this study could inform similar studies that wish to explore the emotional burnout and conflicts stemming from the internalization of stereotypes experienced by BIPOC women leaders in academia.

As a counselor, I have witnessed the beautiful process of teaching the practice of self-compassion and developing deep empathy for self and others. Even so, I have also learned how difficult it is to offer this same empathy and self-compassion to myself. In my growth in clinical practice, it is when I began to live out what I taught to clients that the depth of understanding and empathy for clients grew. I find myself in a similar process now as I complete this dissertation process. I find it critically important to take myself through a spiritual sankofa process before I preach to the masses to engage in a type of research that is healing, impactful, and anti-oppressive. As counselors, we know in our profession how important self-awareness is as a continuous process of our professional development. However, as research-practitioners, I wonder how often we leave ourselves out of research to the detriment of understanding the various cultural ways of knowing and being.

Social injustice is a problem that is relevant within social science research and therefore, counselor education is not exempt from taking steps towards realistic positive social change. The counseling field has a unique opportunity to be a catalyst for social

change. More specifically, students and educators in graduate programs that emphasize social change are positioned to engage with the research topics that promote positive social change. Counselor education is a field I have come to love for many reasons. Particularly, the diverse aspects of the professional identity that create opportunities for social change in numerous ways. One identity that was unique for me was the leadership and advocacy role of a counselor educator. My dissertation contributes to the field of CES by illuminating issues facing Black women in CES doctoral programs

This dissertation was an evolution of moments that I had throughout my educational journey. It has evolved from methodological approach, theoretical foundations, and ultimately finding myself drawn to autoethnography. For some added perspective, the original title of my dissertation was going to be *“The Sunken Place...”* which was indicative of my initial plan to emphasize the struggle as the catalyst as opposed to the growth that can be found in the pain. Even writing this shortened title in this moment brings me to a notable pause in reflection – of where I am in this process now from where I began. The struggle narrative that Black people often get forced into telling is a catch-22. On the one hand, acknowledging the depth of our pain is critical to understanding how to not repeat history – but too often, this is the only story Black people are given space to tell. Thus, wiping out the access or even awareness that other, joyful narratives are equally as present in many of those same narratives. (Re)defining my identity was an added benefit of this study. I recall being asked early on in my program what my research topic would be and after having a rather unpleasant interaction with a faculty member, I recall telling my classmates, *“I think I am too close to my*

population of study – Black women – because what I am studying – I am currently living through...” Little did I know that in my own failed attempts at trying to place distance between myself and my topic, I found myself falling into a methodology that serendipitously positioned me at the center of my study.

With the knowledge I gleaned from the Sankofa practice, I am convinced of the necessity of returning to the past to bring forward culturally rich knowledge necessary to propel forward into social change. Every person has a history to glean from, and while I may share the social identities of those interwoven in the retelling of my tales, this method also served the purpose of furthering understanding the ways in which these critical conversations can arise when handled with care and intentionality.

For this study, I was careful to avoid the incorporating the trope of white savior characters, however, I would be remiss to not share the hope I have for an invitation to these conversations about race, gender, spirituality, and any other topic at the center of social conflict with Black and non-Black allies. Who better than counselor educators to develop models and approaches to facilitating these conversations towards healing oneself and one another? So, even though my CTs explore moments at the intersection of my identity and my desperate search for my humanity within predominantly white spaces – I want to invite the reader to recognize that systemic oppression and white patriarchy are the villains of this story. My hope is that as you read this, no matter which aspect of my story you may (or may not) relate to, that you consider the impact of us all doing our work as individuals first, and then as educators, researchers, practitioners, and advocates. There is much work to do within counselor education to prepare counselors to welcome

and effectively hold space for every part of the experience of Black women, and as such, I insist that one way to approach this type of social change is from an endarkened and embodied sense of wholeness and joy.

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Appendix A: Data Inventory Table

Source of data	Number of pages	Total pages
Critical Tales (CTs)	5-7 pages per CTs,	$5 \times 3 = 15$, $5 \times 5 = 25$
	3-5 CTs	$7 \times 3 = 35$, $7 \times 5 = 35$ 15 - 35 pages
Archival Artifacts (Active Pages) (e.g., social media, email, texts)	1-2 pages per artifact,	$1 \times 5 = 5$, $1 \times 25 = 25$
	5-25 artifacts	$2 \times 5 = 10$, $2 \times 25 = 50$ 5 - 50 pages
Reflexive journal entries and field notes (e.g., research journal, wellness journal)	1-3 pages per week	$1 \times 16 = 16$, $1 \times 24 =$
	16-24 weeks	24 $3 \times 16 = 48$, $3 \times 24 =$ 72 16 - 72 pages
Storyteller Interviews 60–120-minutes	20 pgs. per one hour of transcription	$20 \times 1 = 20$, $20 \times 10 =$ 200
	1-10 interviews	$40 \times 1 = 40$, $40 \times 10 =$ 400 20 - 400 pages
<i>Total Pages</i>		56 - 547

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview Questions

Each participant will participate in one interview lasting between 60-120 minutes. There will be eight open-ended guiding questions used in the semi-structured interviews with each participant. Each interview will be conducted in a conversational style approach using guiding questions with probes. Depending on how the participant elaborates, not all questions may be answered, and the researcher will need to remain flexible. Thus, the unanswered questions in the first interview will guide the second interview, and subsequent member checking sessions (Bhattacharya, 2020)¹. Additionally, based on the semi-structured, open-ended, conversational nature of the interviews, guiding probes will also be used to encourage the participant to elaborate on their response to the guiding question. Certain probes are pre-determined and listed below. Other probes, however, will naturally arise as participants share. All probes will be broadly informed by the guided questions and are used to help explore memories in connection with the researcher.

Interview Script and Guiding Questions

Researcher: Greetings. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. I have obtained your written consent and want to inform you that the recording has started. Before we start, I want to take a moment to review your consent to participate and answer any questions you may have that have come up since we last spoke. As a reminder, the purpose of my study is to explore my experiences regarding my study's area of focus which is Black womanhood, spirituality, education, and social justice and retelling of my story in narratives. A part of recalling memory involves the incorporation of other people's perspectives that can help me remember. As such, I am interviewing people who have known me and can speak about my experiences in my doctoral program or experiences with me as a member on my mother's side of the family. You can withdraw your consent to participate in my study at any time in writing or verbally during an interview.

Do you have any questions about your participation in this study? I want to confirm your consent to progress with Ok, at this time, do you consent to continue with my study?

Guiding Questions Part I

Researcher: These first set of questions are to understand how you interpret or define my study's key concepts.

1. What is your understanding of Black womanhood? What about feminism? Black feminism?

Guiding Probes

¹ Bhattacharya, K. (2020, July 8). Some language for IRB for conducting semi-structured, open-ended interviews. [Facebook post]. Facebook.

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10158613729162774&set=a.139398967773>

- a. What makes a Black woman, a Black woman?
 - b. What, if any, are expectations that others have for Black women?
 - c. What about expectations you have for yourself as a Black woman?
2. How do you define spirituality?

Guiding Probes

- a. Does spirituality have a role in social justice advocacy?
 - b. What, if any, is the connection between spirituality and education?
 - c. What about spirituality's relationship with wellness? Unwellness?
3. What does social justice mean to you?

Guiding Probes

- a. What does social justice feel like? What does it look like?
 - b. What role does social justice play in education, if any?
 - c. What about spirituality and social justice?
4. How does Black womanhood impact your perspective of education?

Guiding Probes

- a. What does it mean to be an educated Black woman?
- b. Does being educated impact spirituality? Wellness? Unwellness?
- c. Does education influence Black women's role in social justice work?

Guiding Questions Part 2

Researcher: These next set of questions are more specific to our interactions together as you help me (re)member parts of my journey as it relates to my topic.

1. What are your memories of me as a Black girl?

Guiding Probe

- a. Tell me a story that comes to mind when you think of witnessing my self-awareness of my Blackness or my *girlness* or womanhood?

2. What are your memories of me regarding spirituality?

Guiding Probes

- a. How did you know I was spiritual?
 - b. How did my spirituality impact our interactions together?
3. What are your memories of my identity as a Black girl/woman in education settings?

Guiding Probes

- a. Did I talk with you about experiences where my Blackness, womanhood (girlhood) seemed to impact my experiences in school settings?
 - b. Did I talk with you about my accomplishments from school?
 - c. Tell me about our interactions about Black womanhood since I have been enrolled in my doctoral program.
4. What comes to mind when you think of your interactions with me regarding speaking out about social injustice?

Guiding Probes

- a. Tell me about a time when we had conversations about civil rights or justice for Black people or Black women.
- b. Did we witness any injustices/discrimination/mistreatment together? If so, what happened?
- c. Tell me about our interactions in the wake of social injustices that occurred in 2020 (i.e., death of Breonna Taylor).
- d. Do you remember interacting with me on social media or witnessing my reaction to these events? If so, what were those interactions like?

Appendix C: Invitation to Study Recruitment Email

Direct Invitation to Study Recruitment Email

Dear Vessa (pseudonym),

I pray this message finds you well and rested. My name is Rhemma Payne, and I am completing my doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at Walden University. One of the last junctures towards obtaining my doctorate is to complete research for my dissertation. Therefore, I am writing to you, to invite you to participate in my study. First, I want to share about the type of research study I am completing and then I will share how I envision you could be a part.

The focus of my study is a critical autoethnography which is an approach to research that is introspective and self-reflective in nature. As such my study involves me retelling of my experiences regarding my study's area of focus which is Black womanhood, spirituality, education, and social justice in narrative form. A part of recalling memory involves the incorporation of other people's perspectives and interactions with me that can help me remember. As such, there are several intersecting aspects of my experiences that are intertwined with your experiences with me in my academic journey or the experiences you have shared with me as a member of my mother's side of the family. Therefore, I am specifically reaching out to you for help in telling parts of my story where you were a witness to my experiences in academic settings or witness to interactions with me as a member of my mother's side of the family. In addition, to participate in my study you must identify as a Black woman and be at least 18 years of age or older. In research studies your role in the study is typically identified as a participant. For my study, I prefer to acknowledge your role as a storyteller. Your participation as a storyteller in my study to add layered accounts of recollection to my personal accounts.

Our interactions will be conversation-style interviews with guided questions. The conversation will serve to familiarize each other with remembering the nature of our connection and how that relates to my experiences. Additionally, I have an interest in exploring your general perspective and definitions of topics. More specifically, I will ask pre-determined questions to help me broadly understand your connection, if any, with specific topics related to my study. These broad guiding questions about my research topic may or may not elicit your recollection of your personal experiences with the topics. You may choose to share your personal experiences or solely reflect on our shared experiences. In our conversational interviews, we will broadly explore Black womanhood, education, social (in)justice, and spirituality.

This study is voluntary in nature and as such, you may choose to refrain from answering specific questions or withdraw your consent to participate altogether. I am appreciative of your time and consideration in reading this invitation. If you choose to move forward with this study, I have included a consent form as an attachment, which offers more specific details about my study, your participation, and provides additional context to the nature of the study. I am available to answer any questions via email at rhemma.payne@waldenu.edu or by phone - [REDACTED].

All the best,

Rhemma Payne

Appendix D: Research Timeline

The table below is a timeline overview I adapted from David Culkin's (2016) dissertation where he acknowledged implementing guidance from scholars who developed timelines for qualitative dissertations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; as cited by Culkin). My hope is that this research timeline provides a guide for future researchers that may use a similar method. Specific details regarding completion dates may have changed due to unforeseen events and thus may alter dates represented below.

Weeks/Dates	Research Task	Comments
Week 1 Jan. 10 th – 16 th 2022 (Proposal Defense)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Prepare presentation slides b) Confirm Date and Time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Practiced presentation with Dr. Keondria week prior. b) Passed proposal defense on January 13th, 2022.
Weeks 2-3 Jan. 17-Jan. 30, 2022 (IRB Application)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Prepare IRB application b) Submit IRB application materials to committee for review c) Complete revisions from committee feedback 	
Weeks 4-5 Jan. 31-Feb.13, 2022 (Data Collection)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Submit IRB application for review b) Outline and draft personal account short stories c) Gather and organize artifacts (i.e., emails, social media posts, journal entries, pictures, memos) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) IRB approval on February 10th, 2022.
Weeks 6-8 Feb. 14-27, 2022 (Data Collection)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Write personal (re)collection short stories b) Gather and organize artifacts c) Reflexive Journaling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Began 8-week Academic Wellness sessions with Dr. Keondria on February 25th, 2022. b) Ongoing task. c) Ongoing task.
Weeks 9-12 Feb. 28-Mar. 20, 2022 (Proposal Editing and Data Collection)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Send proposal document for APA editing b) Revise proposal and change tense in Chaps. 1-3 c) Add artifacts to short stories d) Reflexive Journaling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Used professional editor. b) Supported through various writing groups. c) Ongoing task with focus on construction of autoethnographic personal accounts. d) Ongoing task.
Weeks 13-16 Mar. 21-Apr. 17, 2022 (Data Collection & Analysis)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Invite Participants b) Conduct Interview(s) c) Draft Ch. 4 (results) and Ch. 5 (findings) from autoethnographic data sources. d) Submit drafts of Ch.4 to CAEX course e) Reflexive Journaling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Schedule interview(s) b) Collect consent form and record c) Incorporate interview results into narrative revisions.

<p>Weeks 17-20 Apr. 18-May 15, 2022 (Data Analysis)</p>	<p>a) Revise critical tales b) Data analysis, interpretation, and write findings of interview(s) c) Reflexive Journaling d) Submit 4&5 to Chair, Revisions</p>	<p>d) 6-week CAEX workshop begins; Revisions as needed. e) Ongoing task (focus on experience conducting storyteller interviews). a) Ongoing as necessary. b) Analyze Part I of Interview; Attend Qual Office Hours c) Ongoing task. d) Submitted final study to chair on May 8, 2022</p>
<p>Weeks 21-24 May 16-Jun. 12, 2022 (Final Study)</p>	<p>a) Submit study to Taskstream b) Revisions to final study from committee c) Apply for graduation</p>	<p>a) Pending chair's revisions b) Revise and resubmit as needed. c) Applied: June 10, 2022</p>
<p>Weeks 25-30 Jun. 13-Jul. 24, 2022 (Final Study)</p>	<p>a) Submit final study to Form & Style, Make Revisions b) Prepare Dissertation Defense c) Defend Dissertation d) Corrections to final study</p>	<p>a) Revise as needed b) Practice with Wellness Coach c) Attend as scheduled d) Revise as instructed</p>
<p>Weeks 31-34 Jul. 25-Aug. 27, 2022 (Graduate)</p>	<p>a) Submit Final Study to Taskstream b) Submit dissertation to CAO upon committee approval c) Order Official Transcript d) Complete graduation tasks e) Celebrate being PhiniseD!!!!</p>	<p>a) Submit after defense b) Receive CAO approval c) Order as soon as able d) Completed as required e) Degree Conferred: August 14, 2022</p>

Appendix E: Critical Tales Series

Prologue: (Re)Membering Gay-Gay

July 3, 2019 – Bloomington, Indiana

I will never forget the day I received the call that my grandma, Gay-Gay, was not doing well and would be taken to hospital. I drove up an hour away from Bloomington to Noblesville, and by the time I got to my family's house Gay-Gay was already at the hospital. My thoughts were racing. I knew this hospital well. But not in this way. I was so used to seeing Gay-Gay at my parent's home in her side room. With her TV switched to TBN on a low volume. I didn't know if I was prepared to see her in this hospital bed. When I arrived at the room, my younger brother, dad, and mom were there. Gay-Gay with eyes barely open seemed to be in and out of a *wake* state. I went over to her bed and grabbed her right hand. Tears filled my eyes because her eyes got real big, like she recognized me, and then no words.

Summertime, 1990s – Indianapolis, IN

I do not remember exactly why my brothers and I started calling her Gay-Gay. Someone once told me that gay means "happy." My mother said it was because my brothers and I could not pronounce 'grandma.' One thing I *do* remember is how much I loved spending time with Gay-Gay. Gay-Gay had a way of making everything about life a game. And this wasn't one of those games you stand by and watch others play, Gay-Gay made life fun in a way that everyone had a place to fit in. Gay-Gay didn't play by the rules. She was her own kind of woman. With her sequin-filled shiny blouses and bright red lipstick - to me, she seemed like she ruled the world. A game we would play often while riding in the car was singing a song about what we see

happening around us. Pretty simply, we would fit a word into this blues-y song and join in chorus.

Figure E1

Audio Clip of Sing-A-Long Game

Gay-Gay would start the game, "There goes the postman, [In unison, we'd all sing], "post--man all night long." **Mom led the next line,** "There goes the chimney, [In unison, we'd all sing], "chim--ney all night long" **Then, I'd start the phrase with my sweet, small voice,** "There goes the train, [In unison we'd all sing], "tra--in all night long." [Figure E1]



▶ SCAN ME

This game always tickled me because it was often nonsensical things we would sing, but that was the fun part. It didn't need to make sense. The joy and laughter at ad-libbing was an open invitation for me to join in without fear of doing or saying the wrong thing.

Gay-Gay and I got into some mischief together. We had lots of silly games, like slapping foreheads and making jokes. We'd go on shopping sprees at Value City for household items. Sometimes she'd let me help her shop for groceries at Marsh's. Gay-Gay always had her grocery list with her, but sometimes I would test her, mischievously placing snacks into the cart when she wasn't looking. Then, I would wait to see if she would have me put them back when we got to check out. She never did. She would smile down at me and pull out her colorful money to pay.

She always had her colorful money with her and paying for things never seemed to be an issue. I used to think she was rich, and it wouldn't be until I was well into adulthood that I would realize that Gay-Gay was using colorful food stamp money. This is also when I realized that my draw towards Gay-Gay was not because she was money-rich, but because she was spirit-rich.

Gay-Gay was the total opposite of me. She was assertive, joyful, and confident. I was quiet, reserved, and constantly lost in my thoughts. I was also very sensitive. With two brothers wrestling around the house, and an older teenage sister who was off doing her own thing, you would find me in a corner or tucked away playing quietly with my toys. I used my imagination to explore and rarely shared my thoughts out loud. But not with Gay-Gay! With Gay-Gay, it was different. As a young girl, around 8 or 9, I would spend longer days with Gay-Gay in the summer. Sometimes my brothers would be there, sometimes just me. I shared my thoughts out loud, and it felt ok to wonder about things. I was careful to watch for her reactions. My questions didn't seem to bother her, and I had a lot of questions. Especially about God. When we weren't playing games or watching her shows, Gay-Gay would be on the phone with her friends, yelling at God. She called it praying. All I knew was that this type of yelling didn't scare me. I thought *she must know God real well to talk to Him so boldly like that.*

"Gay-Gay - does God hear us even when our voices aren't loud?" I asked unsure if God would listen to my tiny voice.

"Oh yes. Yes, He does. He will listen to you however you want to talk. He's there and He wants to hear from you."

"Why do you yell on the phone sometimes? When you're talking to God are you fighting?" I was concerned.

"No sweetie. I talk like that to God when I am praying for my friends. We get excited because we know He hears us."

Some time passes but I return to Gay-Gay with questions.

"Gay-Gay, do you pray for me?" I asked, now more curious.

"Oh yes," she exclaimed. "I pray for you all the time. That God sends His angels to protect you."

"Gay-Gay, how do you know God is listening when you pray?"

"Because He gives a sign that He has answered the prayer. And because He protects us and keeps us safe."

Not a lot of this made sense to me, but I was comforted knowing that Gay-Gay prays for me. Her prayers sounded powerful, and I was not so sure my prayers could reach God that far. I also liked thinking that God hears quiet voices too. I decided I would test it out on my own. I tried different ways of praying to God. Once I wrote Him a letter and put it on a balloon, hoping it'd reach Him. Other times, when I was scared, I'd go into a closet and pray. I wasn't scared often, but sometimes my parents would argue so loud and I didn't like that. I thought they would lose their voice so one day, I went into the closet, and pleaded with God - "Please don't take their voice away - I know they are not using it right, but please don't take their voice away." I didn't know if God heard that prayer, but I tried remembering what Gay-Gay said.

July 3, 2019 – Noblesville, Indiana

At the hospital, I barely made it in time to see Gay-Gay one last time. Standing in the hospital room, I looked down at her face, and grabbed her hand. I was hoping to hear her voice another time, though mom said she had lost use of her voice about two days prior. I don't know what was so alarming to me about not hearing Gay-Gay's voice one last time. *Why can't I just be grateful that I get to SEE her?* Something in me felt selfishly entitled to hear Gay-Gay's voice one more time. But though her mouth moved, no sound came out. But her eyes widened, and she grabbed my hand. It felt like she knew I needed to know she knew who I was. I've seen this look before – the look of pure joy in her face.

July 6, 2019 – Bloomington, Indiana

I was not there when she died. None of us were. I'm grateful for my mother not having the torment of being present when she took her last breath. I, however, was angry with God. I wanted more time. I wanted every lasting moment – I wanted to hear her voice one more time. I felt guilty about these silent demands, and I didn't tell anyone because I wanted to remain grateful. One of the nurses whom I knew from high school sent me a Facebook message about Gay-Gay's last moments and shared:

“...I sat with [Gay-Gay] with some music. She went very peacefully.”

.....

(Re)Searching Voice

I find myself walking around my condo, mustering up the strength to sing myself into existence. I find myself missing the feel of air on my vocal cords. I miss the release of a sound as if I was marking my territory with statements as a melody declaring “I am here” – “I exist” – “I matter.” Now, when I think of singing, there is a visceral sensation that clenches my throat, that restricts me. *Am I too loud? Am I disturbing my neighbors?* It isn't much different when I write, either. There is this hypervigilance of having a word or phrase out of place, and fear of deep scrutiny. I have lost the sense of wonder about using my voice for myself – and along the way, I have begun writing, singing, existing for someone else. It is on days like today, that I find myself longing for more time to learn about Gay-Gay's joy. Closing my eyes, sometimes in an effort to almost will Gay-Gay back into existence to help me reclaim this space I am living in. I want to retrieve her sense of carefree, nonsensical wisdom. I don't remember when singing, voicing, and writing stopped being fun for me. Or when I stopped creating for my enjoyment and began creating with fear of others' gaze in mind. Someday, somehow, my recognition of my own voice dissipated. And now as I am embarking on a journey in re-searching myself, I am (re)engaging with fragmented memories about who I am. Some more clear, some more hidden. Some involve my expression of self, and some involve my retreat into silence.

How to Engage with this Critical Autoethnography

In this critical autoethnography I engaged in *mese*search – researching of the self to bring to life the most salient parts of identity at the intersection of education, justice, and spirituality. These collections of short tales are each intertwined within one another, and important for recognizing the messages of strength and resilience that are weaponized against Black women’s pursuit of wellness. They do not need to be read in order necessarily, however, each part is divided to symbolize a progression of experiences from Gay-Gay’s joy to my endarkened joy.

As you read, you will learn of parts of my experiences that map onto what has been found in the literature. Further, you will encounter an introspective view of how stereotypes of identify for a Black woman can be internalized and in my case a detriment to my health and well-being. I recognize the irony of being in a helping profession, learning how to teach helpers, and yet myself being the last to receive help. I hope those in the counseling profession will seek to understand how interconnected our own cultural identities are to the work we do – further understanding that our self cannot be separated from social change.

Part I. (Un)Hiding in white spaces

personal (re)collection // All my teachers are White

For as long as I can remember, I had a fascination with school and learning. Maybe my parents drilled it in me that school was important. Or maybe my obsession with the *African American* Girl doll, Addy and her heroic story of escaping slavery with her family and being the one chosen to go to school. As I look at this picture of my Addy’s school desk, I remember how fond of her I was, and I am reminded of my first experience with the privilege to learn at school.

I don’t remember the exact day when my mom told me that I was finally able to go to the big school, like my big brother, but I know I was very excited. I had to be around 6 or 7 years old. My big brother is a year older than me and even though I didn’t know how long a year was, I just knew he always seemed to be “old enough” to do things that I was told I couldn’t do yet. (I always protested that we were the same height, but no one could ever make sense of that to me).

So, today must be the day. Today I must be older. Mom thought I was ready. And I *was* ready. Mom knocks on my door as she opens it to say, “Get up Binky. It’s time to get ready for school.”

I was laying there, not quite awake, not quite sleep. I was excited. I opened my eyes fully to see my mom’s figure in the doorway. She was already dressed for work. She had to work early some days and some days she got to stay home. I can’t figure this stuff out, but I don’t want to miss my new school, so I hopped out of bed and shuffled up to the doorway. I followed my mom down the hallway towards the bathroom. I was excited. She looked excited and rushed.

“Am I going to the big school today?” This was the school my big brother Randyn went to.

“Yes, you are honey. You’re going to school all by yourself today because I have to take you there early.”

“Ok,” I murmured while scurrying to find my toothbrush. There he goes again, doing something new. But I didn’t care. I get to see Randyn every day at home. Today was my day.

Somewhere along the drive to school, though, my stomach started to hurt. I didn’t know why. I looked at my mom’s face while she was driving, hoping to find comfort there. We had the radio on 106.7 and it was too early for the talkers to be on there chattin’ in between songs. I didn’t like that because I didn’t understand their way of joking, but mom liked it. Now it was just music – and even though I don’t know all the words, the songs feel nice – especially for today.

Today I needed some “peace and quiet” as mom would say. I had so many questions about the new school, but I figured being older meant I had figure it out on my own. But still – the questions persisted in my mind - *Would I meet any friends? Who’s my teacher? Do I get my own desk?* My excitement was fading.

When we pulled up to the school, it looked dull and flat, the building had no color. Maybe that was just the outside. As we got closer to the entrance, I saw a tall White lady standing outside waving the cars over to her and directing the kids inside. My mom parked the car in front of the school and came around to my side to get me out. I noticed the car was running. I grabbed my mom’s hand preparing to walk towards the entrance.

Instead, she knelt to give me a hug and said, “Binky, you’re going to walk in with this teacher here and she’ll show you to your class. This is how they do it at this school.”

But why? Why couldn’t she walk inside with me? I wanted to scream this out loud, but instead my silent pleading remained inside with my other questions. I don’t know if I heard all her words from that point on because my tears had already filled my eyes.

Every tear felt like a question that I was too afraid to ask. I thought I was ready for the big school. Now I’m not so sure.

We said our goodbyes in the car. I knew mom could see the pain in my face, but she needed to go. I made it to the curb of the school and then collapsed to the ground, hunched over, and crying. There was this White woman teacher outside waiting for me. She bent down next to me to comfort me. “She’s going to come back. She’ll be here when school is done to pick you up. Let’s go inside,” she said. She was trying her best, and I imagine I didn’t have much of a choice but to trust her. Mom was gone.

I followed this teacher inside and she led me downstairs to a dark and dingy basement. I notice right away that all the teachers look like this White woman who met me outside. And all the students were Black like me. I wasn’t familiar with cafeterias then, so it seemed odd to have so many people eating in one space. The woman explained to me that she wasn’t my teacher and carried on with giving me information about breakfast each morning. I was overwhelmed by all the people, and at some point, stopped listening. *How was I supposed to remember all this?*

When I looked up, she was gone. Now I'm standing in this big room, not quite sure what to do next. All the teachers were so much bigger than me and then there were other children but what could they know. I was focused on finding other teachers to help me. I didn't have to move far before another teacher came along and asked if I needed help getting my food. I nodded 'yes'. I hadn't spoken since the car ride. She understood my nod and took me through the line and spoke for me. I didn't mind.

In another instant, she was gone as well. *Where did she go?* Lost in a sea of the other teachers, I imagine. I continued to wander around this big room, now looking for a place to sit. No one told me about this part. I guess being older now I need to find a spot on my own.

I see a large table with big chairs and then a smaller table with small chairs. A few teachers were at the big table. They have been so helpful to me so far, so I head towards the big table. As my eyes landed on an empty chair I was stopped by another teacher. She was tall White lady like the other teachers, with dark black hair. She stood towering over me, commanding my attention. And she had an angry expression on her face. I didn't have time to react before she screamed down at me, **"YOU DON'T SIT HERE! This table is for teachers. You sit [with the kids] over there"**. She pointed towards another, much smaller table.

I stood in embarrassment. I was shamed with myself. She was so angry. *How did I not know this?* I had no words to defend myself. I just adjusted to the correction. Her words, her angry expression – it all sent a shock through my body. Her voice was loud like a roar, and I was certain everyone could hear. I stood in shock until I managed to move my little body towards the small table, with caution. And the feeling. I couldn't escape the feeling that I had done something terribly wrong.

There was no helper for this next part. Suddenly everything seemed so big, except for me. Big table, tall teachers, and even the tray in my hand now felt much bigger than my body. I found my way to the kid's table. I sat there and ate in silence. I didn't know what I did wrong or why all of a sudden there weren't any more helpers to guide me. What I **did** know is that I never want to be at the wrong table again.

therapy Session // Understanding belonging

"Tell me a bit about why you chose to share this story in our session today?" Dr. Naomi wasted no time.

"Well, I'm piecing together these parts of myself. I remember myself in some ways that feel like I was unstoppable. And at other times, I felt so fragile and sensitive, especially to criticism from my teachers. They held such a heavy role for me." I leaned back in my chair and close my eyes for fear that tears will spill out. "For some reason there is something in this memory that comes up ever so often. Usually when I'm in conflict, or when I'm anxious. This feeling of being stunned or feeling deep shame when I've made an error. I don't know if I just want to blame this teacher or if something really rooted in me that day. But I will never forget that feeling."

Welp, here come the tears. This time they felt hot like anger.

“I get so tired of being so sensitive sometimes. Like I clearly know that that teacher was wrong, but I still feel it in my body. The shock of being found somewhere I wasn’t supposed to be, feeling accused and misunderstood, feeling wrong. Out of place. My adult self knows that is not happening to me now, but sometimes I still feel like I’m bracing myself for something terrible like that...to be somewhere I don’t belong....”

Dr. Naomi hasn’t stopped looking at me. That was oddly comforting. I still felt silly. I’m 36-years-old processing a memory from kindergarten.

“Have there been times since then, where you felt that way? Like you didn’t belong?”

personal (re)collection // Writing while Black

I remember learning from Gay-Gay that God hears all types of ways of praying. I used to write Him letters and tie the end of a balloon to the single sheet to send it off in the clear blue skies. I was always confident it would reach Him. At some point after my first-grade teacher yelling at me, I developed quite an adversity to loud voices. I developed a slight stutter in speech some time shortly after that incident. It only seemed to surface significantly when I was speaking to adults or authority figures. I imagine I continued to believe that there was a right and wrong way to speak. Sometimes, though, I considered ways to make my voice smaller. I never wanted to yell at anyone because I saw yelling as a part of anger that needed to stay quiet. I eventually found a workaround through writing out my feelings in poems, song lyrics, and short stories – not too loud, not too soft – and most importantly these words could stay hidden. My stutter eventually went away, but my love to write as a form of expression remained. Whatever I imagined, whatever I could envision – there was a place for my written voice to be heard.

It wasn’t until late in graduate school that I realized all the accolades and recognition I had received in school for my creative writing were perhaps untrue. I remember meeting with a professor, a woman of color in her office as she often did to review paper feedback with students. I was sure I wasn’t in trouble as I had written well in her class. I sat in her office with her in a mess of a circle surrounded by stacked papers, and tables full of books. The knowledge in this room seemed profound.

She seemed busy as she turned her chair around to face me. She handed my paper to me and said, “You write well for a Black student.”

I was stunned. I didn’t say anything then. I actually didn’t say anything to her ever, verbally. I kept writing though gradually my creative imagination was stifled as I focused on sounding smart. At some point, writing stopped being a safe place altogether. I used to think I was going to prove that professor wrong by somehow excelling academically – but this came at a cost. No more silly stories. No more songwriting or poetry. I had to

write well and keep writing well. I would not relent in my academic pursuits until eventually, writing well led to my gradual fragmentation from writing while being well.

personal (re)collection // Enduring insensitivity in white spaces

I remember hearing about George Floyd and refusing to look at the video that was being shared around social media. It was entirely too much at that point to consume these images and visuals of Black death and frankly the apathy of others towards the pain in the black community. It feels odd to even say in the black community as if others can't recognize pain for what it is when people die, when tragedy happens, when inhumane and unjust actions happen, I do not see so many people struggle to identify with others.

While waiting for a Zoom meeting to start, I overheard a conversation between two white male colleagues discussing their thoughts on the protests happening across the world. One of them lived in an area that was directly impacted by police brutality more recently.

"It must be scary, ya know, with all the rioting. Scary stuff."

I listen on and think of myself and our other Black colleague who are also impacted by the events of this year. I listen a bit longer, waiting to hear mention of how terrifying it must be to be Black in America right now.

"Yea, I have a friend who has a business over there. His place is ok, but yea still scary."

Not amazed but equally appalled at the content of the concern. Property being destroyed is the concern. Got it.

I sat in the Zoom meeting, waiting for it to start. It felt like agony. I was feeling more detached than usual today. The meeting starts as it has been recently with us all acknowledging the land we sit on, either verbally or in the chat. I chose to use the chat this time. No way I can trust my vocal cords to be poised after what I just heard. *How am I supposed to function today?* I commend our supervisor for centering current events before we move to business. She is a white woman, and from our conversations separately, I know she is wanting to do her own deep work to dismantle patriarchy and supremacy. She started a little differently today, with a complaint received anonymously about a recent training we had that discussed microaggressions. Another white woman who rarely speaks up in these meetings asked for an example of a microaggression, noting that *'it is hard to tell sometimes if the other person was being malicious or not'*. I glanced at the one other Black woman on the call. With just one look, I knew we both had stories, but which one of us would be called upon today? I took the bait so she could rest.

"I have a recent event that has happened that may help shed some light." I pause frequently as I often do. Calculating my breaths, my statements, my tone. I was policing myself before anyone else could. I continue, "I was out at dinner with a former colleague and catching up. I had just gotten my hair braided and while we were all sitting at the table, one of my white colleagues reached across the table and over my food to touch my hair. My whole body physically recoiled before I

could say a word, and yet, that was not enough for her to pause before violating me.” I pause as I realize this was probably already too much.

I look around at the faces on the call and proceed, “I mean, my body physically told her that what she was planning to do was not ok, and she proceeded to touch me while telling me, ‘I wasn’t going to pull it.’ That was her defense. For me, microaggressions is not about the intent as I’m sure my other two colleagues, also White women colleagues, who witnessed her unwanted touch that night might agree that she had no malicious intent, however, the fact stands that there is a history rooted in oppression that makes microaggressions different than just doing something that hurts someone’s feelings. The harm went beyond her initial offense into her explanation which invariably silenced me. Unless I wanted to make a bigger scene, I had no choice but to sit there and act as if I was okay. In that moment, it seemed as though she felt her curiosity afforded her ownership over my body...”

There was a brief silence before the white woman who asked us that question spoke up again. She seemed bothered by what I shared but offered her own story. She shared a time she was out with a close friend and their two children. She recalled a woman approaching one of her friend’s daughters who had a beaded feather attached to her straight reddish hair. The woman approached them all and complimented the child’s hair accessory, while simultaneously placing the feather in her hands. “The lady seemed nice and very fascinated with this type of accessory...My friend did not take offense to this at all, it seemed harmless...” She continued her story which shifted the focus to the intent of the offender rather than to explore why this can be harmful to an individual. I switched my camera off video and just took a moment. I don’t know why I feel compelled in spaces when it seems uncomfortable for people to listen. I could tell she was trying to understand, but through her white lens, which was minimizing my experience.

The meeting seemed to move on after that. Perhaps everyone was uncomfortable. The discussion switched to another topic, but then to my surprise another white woman spoke up and said, “I’d like to revisit what Rhemma shared if that’s ok.” She continued to speak to the first woman’s question about microaggressions and added this distinction, “I think it’s important to specify that in Rhemma’s experience, she was an adult when that happened to her...” Her recognition of this detail resonated with me. I reached out to her in private chat (Figure E2):

Figure E2

Zoom Chat Direct Message, April 2021

14:49:56 From Rhemma Payne, LMHC LLC to [REDACTED] (Direct Message) : Thanks for what you shared earlier and pointing out the parallel of being an adult woman when that happened to me. I appreciate that. Thank you
 14:55:14 From [REDACTED] to Rhemma Payne, LMHC LLC (Direct Message) : Thank you for being willing to share and walk back through that experience. To your point earlier, there's no need to wait on white women for understanding to validate the truth. I see you though and so appreciate you!

.....

Part I Critical Tale Realizations

There was something very endarkening about the sequence of tales and understanding how I had mischaracterized Black women who used their voices to speak up as being right or wrong. Being too Black, too opinionated, too angry, too expressive. So while my grandmother anchored my belief that God would respond to me no matter how loud I spoke, over time (and through the admonishment of white and non-Black educators yelling at me or praising me for being ‘articulate’ and ‘well-spoken’) – I started minimizing my voice in my expressions to prove that I was not a threat. Consequently, I began to judge people like my mother and negatively associated their advocacy with the angry Black woman trope. This created an internalized shame of speaking up for myself (or others). I continued living in my body, separated from the experiences desperate to find a way to hide in white spaces – for safety – for belonging. And this somehow manifested in how I wrote and spoke in these spaces – apologetic for every word that I used – careful to not disrupt the peace.

I continued to placate people who were in authority positions to avoid wrath or danger continued to play out throughout my doctoral studies until I made the connection of the importance of having places of refuge where I could be opinionated, where I could share all my feelings out loud and work against the internalization of the angry Black woman which minimizes experiences to one single emotion, regardless of the cause or conditions creating the reaction. I began to see through the life of my mother as a caring, passionate advocate for us all, and recognized her own display of spirituality came through her advocacy. So, Gay-Gay was right in that God can hear every voice.

Throughout the iterative process of this study, I was able to examine myself with critical introspection to see how internalization of stereotypical tropes had led to a type of hyperarousal around fear of not being believed. For instance, as I wrote the tales, going back and forth between drafts, I realized that part of internalization that surfaced was the fear of not being believed. I drifted towards sharing the tales that had the most “evidence” instead of telling the tales that I knew were the most vulnerable and relevant to my topic. I began relying on finding artifacts that showed that these experiences happened. It was through trusted conversations that I realized that I was exhibiting signs of internalizing messages that I was untrustworthy by default without the ability to have the benefit of the doubt of those who do not know me. All I would have to defend my words were the visibility of my skin color, gender, and all the tropes that trail behind.

Part II. (Re)Cognizing the veil of strength

personal (re)collection // the unprotected Black woman

I don’t remember how exactly I came to know about Breonna Taylor’s death. Judging by my Facebook post (Figure E3), I must’ve come across another hashtag in the lineage of unjustified deaths. I do recall that not too long after was the death George Floyd and the knowledge of Ahmaud Arbery’s death – and it all felt like too much. It *was* too much. Something about Breonna Taylor’s death gripped me in a different way. I had never felt more connected and pained by the knowledge of someone I had never met. The more I found out the more infuriated I became for

her, for her mother, for all who knew her. There were details surrounding her death that were unmistakably hostile. When some footage of the responding officers who arrived on the scene after the shooting was released, I watched them incessantly. I'm not exactly sure of what I was looking for. I wonder if I was searching for an ounce of humanity to be extended even in her dying moments. I found none.

Years before learning of Breonna Taylor's death, I have been negatively impacted by the images and stories behind these deaths. After a sequence of police brutality deaths in 2016 and the political rhetoric of hate, I began having nightmares of white men with red hats crawling up my patio window and shooting me while I slept. During this time, I was working in a community mental health setting where my office was located near back of the building, isolated from the other therapists. I felt hypervigilant to the hate that seemed emboldened and my location in the building was discomfiting. My supervisor and I discussed it being time for me to request a window office as was customary for therapists to request a better office based on seniority when one became available. I decided to use this opportunity to request an office move.

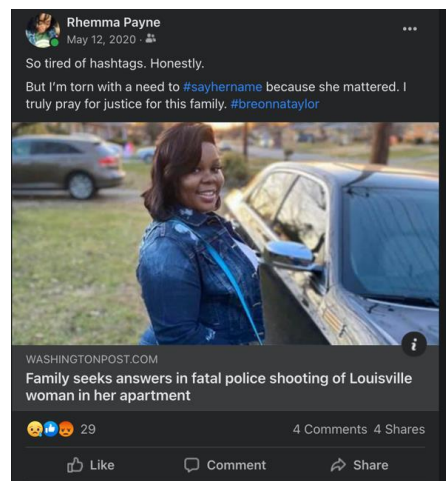
I put in a request for an office in the main hallway near the other therapists. It was denied. I was told about some protocol. When another office in the main hallway became available, I requested again and was denied. Each of my subsequent requests were denied, one by one. Months go by and I watched each of my other colleagues move to offices unfettered. Including therapists who were hired after me. The second office I requested was not even a window office and remained vacant for most of the year. Again, being told this office was being held based on a protocol that I was never shown. What was so different about my requests? The absurdity of my denied requests became a running joke in the department. One therapist, upon her resignation placed a sign on her door designating her office to me. I never shared my reasoning for wanting to move, besides with my supervisor. So, I was forced to watch others move about freely without question. This was not about an office. The truth is, no matter where I was located, I was constantly reminded that being Black, being a woman, and wanting to be protected was too much to ask.

personal journal // Minimizing pain

Anxiety is a nasty beast. I don't talk about it often because it feels like a shameful weakness. And the pressure I feel I must answer to, like a nagging sense that I should figure things out on my own. My anxiety has gotten bad, though. I told my friends that I am contemplating talking to my doctor about medication. That seemed like a big step even though I haven't followed up with my doctor. Every time I speak of my anxiety, I am somewhat minimizing and somewhat hoping others will recognize the truth I am not speaking. I'm certainly not as vocal as the women in my family. So, revealing another weakness in vulnerability seems like another failure.

Figure E3

Facebook Post, May 12, 2020



personal (re)collection // Missing the mark

It was the beginning of the year and I had just reapplied for a competitive doctoral fellowship award. The first year (2019) I applied, I remember being at the ACA conference in New Orleans, waiting in line at Café Du Monde for their famous beignets, when I checked my email and read the first two sentences, “We regret to inform...” I was devastated and began to cry. Thankfully I was surrounded by colleagues in counseling field who were more than encouraging and empathetic. Perhaps I also found encouragement having just presented on a topic I’m passionate about “...Counseling the Strong Black Woman” – I felt this was the epitome of the spiritual phrase *delay but not denied*. My work in this field was just beginning and I just knew that I would be a stronger candidate the next year. So here I was at the end of the application season in December 2019, preparing for the second time to apply for the fellowship. This time around I was much more than prepared. I requested information from all my recommenders early enough to have completed before the deadline. However, this year there were a few changes to the application process. One change being that the recommendation letters now had to be sent directly from the recommender. I couldn’t submit them on their behalf. This was worrisome, but I trusted everyone I had asked to help support me. I gathered all the information, sent reminder emails, checked for handwritten signatures, and verified that each person had the link.

The night before the letters were due, I saw my last recommendation letter come through the system. I was relieved yet in the dark on if all the requirements were met. That Monday, the actual due date, I asked my last recommender to send me a copy of her letter so I could have a copy for my records. I like to keep records and since this last part of the application was outside of my control, this was my attempt to gain some peace. It was around 7 or 8 pm that night (past the deadline) and as I was getting out the shower when I heard that notable email ping come through my phone. To calm my nerves, I decided to check it while walking down the hallway to my room. I see the email if from the letter writer that I was expecting. Eagerly, I open the email to find an attachment of her letter. I opened the attachment and I see that her letter is not on letterhead. I don’t even know if I looked far enough to see if it was signed because suddenly my whole world seemed to freeze in that hallway. I collapsed to the floor, grabbing my towel around me, and gasped as if searching for air. This uncontrollable fear and anxiety overtook me.

My body was shaking and yet felt eerily still. Tears were coming out, but I was numb. The phone was on the floor and everything around me goes out of focus. I go into war with myself about missing this detail. How could I miss this? A part of the process that I would have looked through – that I would have examined – that I would have caught this beforehand. And I just froze. My thoughts were coming in fast, but my body was still frozen in time. I was emotionally stunned. I kept repeating, ‘I’ll be ok. I’m ok,’ in an obsessive compulsory way. I knew this meant I was not convinced of the words I was saying. I was inconsolable and could not soothe myself. Before I knew it, my heart was pounding. *Am I having some kind of a heart attack?* My thoughts were racing, and my body was moving slow. I knew logically, and clinically what was happening. I was panicking – I was having an anxiety attack. But even this did not stop me from frantically feeling as though my life was ending. That this mistake I had made was unacceptable. And that I would not be able to recover.

The thoughts kept flooding in. Thoughts about overwhelming amount of student loan debt. The pressure to do well – so I could finish – so I could get out of debt – so all of this would be worth it – All of my future felt dependent on this fellowship. I needed these finances to be able to finish – to be able to support myself. What were my options now? Every other solution felt so obsolete. This was my plan. I failed to be accepted last year. I had missed the mark such a huge way. But what was the most gripping in all the sea of thoughts passing through – was this thought that flooded my mind of – you won't even make it to the table. So, it wasn't so much about if I had applied again and didn't get it. At the core I think I knew that's a possibility this is a competitive fellowship, but it was the fact that I could make a mistake that wouldn't even get me on the table to be considered. THAT felt unforgivable to me. I reach for my phone. I was still crying uncontrollably. I felt a strong sense of self-hatred, shame, and self-depreciating thoughts flooding my mind. I needed to feel a sense of prayer coming through and sweeping over me. I text a handful of friends: "Please pray for me...I'm having an anxiety attack..."

therapy session // (Re)membering falling apart

"You seem exhausted by all of this," Dr. Naomi closed the share screen that she pulled up with the emails I forwarded to her. "Between work, school, and church, it seems that what you are feeling inside is coming up everywhere."

"Yea, I guess that is what I am struggling with. I was literally sick to my stomach the day of the announcement regarding the officers who killed Breonna Taylor. I cancelled my clients for the afternoon and then when I logged online, I started seeing people post coverage – it seems we were all waiting desperately to see justice – to see the officers charged with her death. Then, I heard the outcome. All of a sudden, I felt that something in my body knew why I had not been feeling unwell. There was no doubt, I was feeling disgust in my body before I even knew that the walls of the apartment next to hers would receive more justice than Breonna.

"Wow." Dr. Naomi left room for silence. So, I kept talking. "I showed up for my lecture but emailed my professor about an assignment. I did not know how to focus on anything else. Though, I'm always hesitant to directly ask for help. This was really the first time I've stepped out and expressed my truth. Like I'm at capacity and I'm becoming less concerned about appeasing white people in white spaces. I'm speaking up and sometimes it seems I'm receiving the brunt of it."

"The brunt of it?" Dr. Naomi asked.

"Backlash. I mean I don't really know because at the same time, I am more free than I've ever been. I have been so concerned and careful about every word I used in the past. Even in the email to my Christian boss, I apologized at first. I see it sprinkled into my academic writing. Apologizing for taking up space or over-explaining things in preparation for backlash. At work, I conceded to make to apologize to the other team members for my absence during a time that I was struggling to show up fully. This was to keep the peace, even though I eventually began my exit from this job. So, I mean there is still a lot of this stuff that is so ingrained that it comes out.

But ultimately, I think I'm moving towards choosing myself," I reflected while holding back tears.

Part II Critical Tale Realizations

These tales endarkened the experience of enduring hardship that interferes with the ability to engage in true wellness. Building from my understanding of the EBW trope which promotes Black women's pursuit of education against all odds, it is fitting that in the tales in Part II, that I would find myself ignoring my mental and physical health needs while pursuing my doctorate degree. Regarding the tale, the unprotected Black woman, I reflected on two experiences: (a) The impact of reading about Black women dying without remorse or justice, and (b) my own feeling of being unprotected while working in a mental health setting. I felt bound within the SBW trope of endurance and resilience through adversity. I remember wondering if I offered up the salacious details of vulnerability regarding my fears if my request would be granted. Ah, yes, the struggle narrative that is often synonymous with being Black and being a woman. Then, my white administrators could take pity on me and act as though granting this request was some grand gesture and not just a policy that many had taken advantage of without having to share a sad, uncomfortable story. *Had I shared how I felt threatened as a Black woman in the back of the building, would my request have been granted? Or would I stand there, denied, but now exposed at the mercy of this veil of protocol?* But what happens when I no longer want to struggle? The cost of wellness often forfeits dignity, and I was resisting offering that part of myself as a token.

The tale, *Missing the Mark*, provided insight into a type of resilience that is sustained by Black women's belief that strength equates to not asking for help and self-sacrificing behaviors, both which are characteristics found within the SBW phenomena. Writing that tale including my (re)remembering of how tense I was about applying for a doctoral fellowship. Having applied before, though, I knew that any detail out of place would cause my application to be rejected as it says as much in the application instructions. I also knew from conversations with former fellows about this fellowship that some applications don't even make it to the proverbial "table" to be considered if they are missing required components. So, it was quite unusual for me to overlook this detail and not double, and triple check all my materials. I recall noting my financial need in my application statement, sharing about the detrimental impact of financial strain of student loan debt for Black women pursuing higher degrees.

By the time I was reapplying for the doctoral fellowship, I had probably veiled my anxiety by over-productivity that did not allow me to see how truly rigid I had become over the course of a twenty years of education. It scares me to think about it even now but in that moment, I was terrified of how hopeless I felt. I could not see myself surviving this (and other) failures, as I saw this as the only way to get to where I needed to be – for survival. I also had gathered a sense of false security in education. Over the years, I began to believe that being educated would prevent me from the effects of systemic oppression. After my mind was clear, I thought to email my recommender to see if she submitted a copy of her letter on official letterhead. She quickly replied, "Yes..., that copy is saved on my computer at work."

Figure E4 is an excerpt from my doctoral fellowship application in which I shared a story of a fellow student I admired who was unable to continue studies due to financial need. This excerpt goes into my rationale for financial need. The burden of being faced with not finishing due to my own financial need was no doubt the basis of my anxiety on that night.

Figure E4

Excerpt from Doctoral Fellowship Personal Statement, December 2019

I have a hard time sitting with the reality of her story. I have considered whether the lack of representation that I long to see with Black women in these spaces primed for social change is because we simply do not have enough resources to complete the journey that takes us to these spaces. It is difficult to consider how my story could play out similarly and that I could be left in survival mode instead of social change mode. I, too, have attempted to pay out of pocket. Personally, there are several ways in which financial need is a barrier to progressing with my goals for my professional career. I have tremendous school debt that is crushing to consider, especially when I have yet to complete my doctoral degree. There have been times where I have attempted to pay for a term, however, the interest accrued during my "in-school" status continues to be alarming and restrictive. I plan to continue making waves and asking the difficult questions in spaces where people who look like me are less likely to penetrate. I also have a desire to have restorative conversations with all future educators and counselors who will work with people who look like me, to bridge the gap between understanding the need for diversity and truly embracing diversity through actions that are compassionately aware, restorative, and intentional in action towards a shared space for all.

The tremendous anxiety I felt in response to making mistakes is a thread throughout my tales, and shows up first in Part I.

Flash forward to November 30th, 2020, the day I was prepared to start my

dissertation course – I was admitted to the hospital. I had not felt well but did not feel "sick enough" to need help. I was not well and asked for prayer on Instagram. After some gentle probing from an Instagram friend who offered to pray for me along with a strong dose of, "...girl, go to the doctor," did I decide to get checked out. Turns out my symptoms were severe enough to send me straight to the ER. There was something comical and disconcerting about the impact of her message, though. *How was it that a 30-something-year-old Black woman was not aware that her symptoms were severe?* These tales endarkened how unrelenting the internalization of strength and fortitude was for me.

Part III. (Re)Visioning righteous anger

personal (re)collection // Yellin' and complainin'

I remember being so embarrassed each time my mom would speak up in public. It felt like she was always yelling and angry about something that I never quite understood. The attention would get drawn to us and I found that horrifying. Standing in line at the grocery store, someone would cut in front of us. It seemed like my mom was always at the 'edge of her nerves' and that each time something happened that was not right, she had to say something. It used to embarrass me and my siblings. Sometimes I would think, 'Does something really need to be said?'

When I was in fourth grade, I was walking down the hallway with a friend and peeked into my younger brother's classroom just to be nosy. I look through the open door and I immediately see him in the back of the class, facing the wall reading to himself. *Oooohhh, he must be in trouble.* I figured he was in trouble because his teacher was at the front

of the classroom reading with the other students. In my usual nature, I tattled as soon as I got home. My brother hung his head low and provided an explanation, "I was reading too slow, so she had me sit in the back." I cannot quite describe the flush of anger that came across my mother's face. For some reason, even though I was too young to understand, I thought that didn't sound right. *Why wouldn't the teacher help him?* Well, I wish I could recall all the words my mom had with his teacher that next day, but she had us kids stand outside the hallway. We heard mostly our mother's voice but could only fill in the blanks with our imagination. The teacher came out distraught and my mother took us all home.

I remember reading all kinds of civil rights books, admiring people like Rosa Parks with the Montgomery Bus Boycotts. I don't know why it was easier to see their efforts for social justice as noble and my mom's protests as annoying. But for some reason, this day with my brother was the first time I saw my mother in this light. This was the first time I began to think *'maybe mom's not always angry for no reason – maybe for a Black woman and Black mother - this is what love through advocacy looks like.'*

therapy session // Losing strength

"What do you want to tell me about the journal entries you sent me last week?" Dr. Naomi never wears full-blown concern on her face when she asks me these questions. She just tilts her head and fixes her eyes on me. It can be intimidating at times, but also comforting.

"I am sorting through understanding the strength of the women in my family. Their ability to stand up against injustices with such confidence. I feel I'm in no way like that. I remember watching my mom 'go off' on people all the time. It used to be annoying. Like, 'mom why do you have to say something every time?' Now, I get it. It's like I see the things happening around me. People discriminating, making rude comments, and I don't say anything. I just retreat into myself."

"So there seems to be a way that you view yourself in comparison to your mother and grandmother – the Black women in your family?" Dr. Naomi asked though I suspect she knows the answer.

"I guess, I mean I am so quiet compared to them. My mom says I take things to heart, and I've always been quiet and 'Hard to read.' I mean, I feel conflicted. I've seen them speak up against wrongdoing, but what good does that do?"

I look down at my notes and read my writings in the margins: *I am tired of writing about Black mothers, Black daughters, and Black women being in pain, pleading for their life, and dying anyway.*

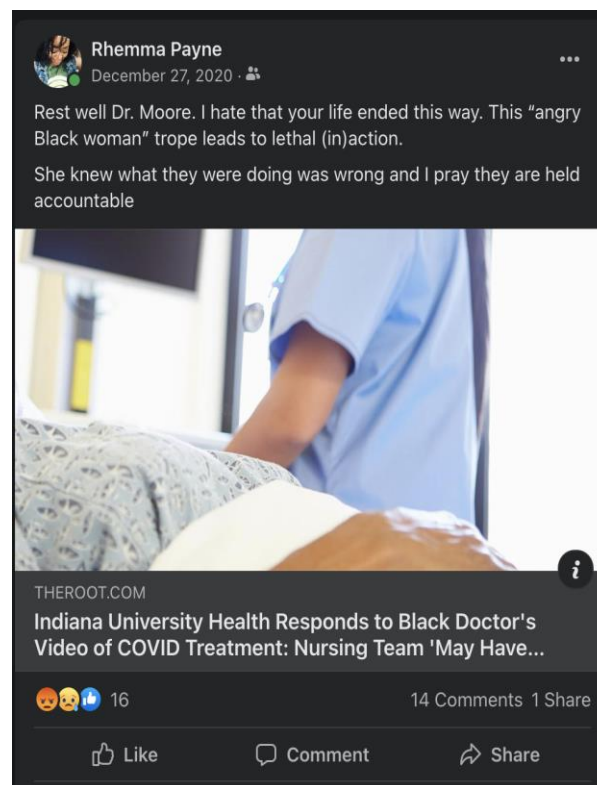
personal (re)collection // Witnessing mistreatment

When I learned about a Black woman, Dr. Moore, dying shortly after she attempted to advocate for herself while undergoing medical treatment, I was deflated and mortified (Figure E5). Earlier this month, the week I started my dissertation course, I wound up in the hospital. I remember a woman of color mentor reminding me to advocate for myself during my stay, saying, *'Hospitals make me nervous, and they don't treat Black women and WOC well....'*

I knew what she meant then, and at the same time recognized my vulnerability in needing to trust those sworn to care for me. Reading this story about Dr. Moore brought back to mind how much I have learned to monitor my emotions, my expressions, 'not too loud, not too bold' as the cost of being seen as angry, quite literally could be devastating.

Figure E5

Facebook Post, December 27th, 2020



Reflexive Journal Entry, Feb 23rd, 2022

Maybe I'm not angry, maybe I'm tired. When I look back on what was modeled to me, I can't recall my mother or grandmother ever NOT speaking up. My grandmother used her voice loud and demonstratively on her phone prayer calls. My mother, I saw speak up most when we were out and about. But very specifically, around issues with school. Mom seemed to always have something to say - at least from my point of view.

therapy session // Reaching the end of politeness

Dr. Naomi opens the video session and immediately I notice her phone in her hand. Reading something. It took me a second to realize what she was looking at.

“So, talk to me about this post you shared with me,” she inquired. [Figure E6]

“Yeah, I’m sorry I emailed you so late. I was, I guess I still am really taken aback by how quickly things have escalated with my job and I’m still not able to understand what’s coming up for me or why I feel so wronged right now.”

“Well let’s talk about it,” Dr. Naomi was being neutral, but I sensed that she saw my screenshot and has an idea of the type of anger I’m feeling. Today I can notice some pain in her voice as well.

“Walk me through what you were feeling when you wrote this.”

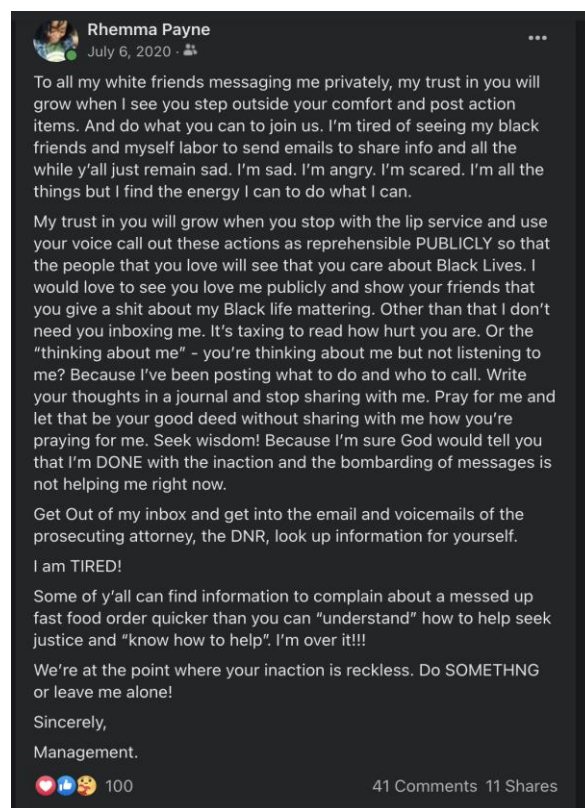
“Well, there had just been a violent event here nearby my city at a lake that I have been to, that my friends walk at. Upon learning about it and watching the video footage. I saw two to three white men attacking a Black man. What was most frightening was hearing the white women who were with the white men telling them to ‘get off him!’ To me that shed light on the amount of rage in those men that even people close to them knew they were out of control. That shook me.”

Dr. Naomi inhaled in, and I realize, me recounting this event would have to have an impact on her as well. I cannot imagine anyone hearing the details and not responding. “Wow.” She didn’t force more words. She took another inhale. She continued, “How did this post come about?”

“Well, I call this the infamous post. I was receiving so many texts, FB messages, and responses from people who heard what happened. I couldn’t respond to them. I was angry at the county’s inaction against these men. I was angry at the people who didn’t seem to be

Figure E6

Facebook Post, July 6th, 2020



angry. I was processing real time and upset by the 'praying for you' texts' I was receiving from my White friends and colleagues on Facebook. So, I decided to stop responding.

"So, is that how the conflict with your work colleague started?" Dr. Naomi was trying to piece together how this led to my interpersonal conflict at work.

"Yes. My supervisor reached out to me to share that one of my colleagues, a White woman, had an issue with the post and believed it was about her since she had texted me this day. I was originally asked by my supervisor, a Black woman, to speak to my colleague about it to absolve her guilt and clarify that the post was not about her. I remember feeling irritated and pointing out how the exhaustion I was complaining about in the post is the exact reason why I would decline to go out of my way to make this White woman feel ok. I referenced another incident that occurred years prior with a former colleague, another white woman, who had an issue with something I posted online and instead of coming to me, she went to my supervisors. I noted to her this trend of having her step in to correct me for something that was unrelated to work, and the burden placed on me in both situations to *'reach out to them to resolve the issue to maintain a collaborative, God-centered work environment.'*" I continue sharing, "It is beyond exhausting to have to walk on eggshells around White women in this supposed Christian environment."

"So, this has happened before?" Dr. Naomi was vested in my sharing.

"Yes, and I felt since this colleague was White, she was allowed to escape the responsibility of confronting me personally, and instead made this a work-related issue by painting me as the angry Black woman. She then convinced three other White colleagues that this FB post was so offensive that they too brought complaints to my supervisor. The two white women were kept anonymous which felt like a form of protection. I know this would not have happened if the roles were reversed. So, I told my supervisor that I was not going to initiate discussions with colleagues who did not come to me to resolve their offense towards me. I reminded her that if there was an issue my colleague took with my post, her biblical responsibility was to come to me to resolve it before involving others. My supervisor eventually conceded though she later continued playing the middleperson trying to resolve the issue for the White woman. Then, came the onslaught of emails, texts, phone calls between myself and my supervisor," I started scrolling through my phone for the evidence.

Dr. Naomi nods her head as I sifted through the various exchanges of messages, I sent her. She interrupts my thoughts, "As you read these aloud, what do you notice about yourself?"

I stopped rummaging and I look up at her to respond, "It seems like I was reaching the end of this phase of politeness. I was reaching the end of myself, and I was speaking up for myself. That's all I can think as I read through these again. I think by this time, I had been engaging with so many meetings and emailing my supervisor back and forth. I think by the time my last email came through, and after being told that several colleagues had 'lost trust

in [me],’ that I lost patience. I was running out of grace to extend to those anonymous complaints. I was done. I was done with the extra effort...done with my colleagues’ white fragility. It was odd in a way because for the first time in a long time, it was like I was refusing to let these words penetrate and silence me. I asked to have a meeting with everyone involved. Even though over time I realized I needed to prepare my exit from this environment, I was proud of myself. I can’t remember a time when I advocated for myself to be heard in this way.”

I continued to share, “And, also, I’ve made a decision to leave this Christian work environment. I am not sure how I feel about it entirely. My hurt has been unaccounted for and though there were discussions on how I could continue at this job under someone else’s leadership, I do not think I could’ve stayed and been well.”

“And it’s through these realizations that you are making have encouraged you to take a step in leaving this space?” Dr. Naomi seemed to not protest my decision. Yet, she remained curious in helping me know in my core, that I was tending to myself.

“Yes. I took a step back here recently and it was actually a blessing that this colleague had pushed back the meeting with our boss because it gave me time to think and pray. And pray and think. I’ve also begun a time of mourning.”

“Wow. Mourning.” Dr. Naomi left room for that word to sit in the atmosphere before she added, “Are you mourning?”

“Yes. Here and there. It feels like there are times I tend to the grief and times where I don’t. The times I allow myself to feel fully, I can see more of the spiritual and racial issues underlining these decisions – and that makes me sad more than anything. As far as the anger. That’s still there. She never apologized for her harsh words, for gossiping among our colleagues, and for using her role in the company to seek retaliation against me. So, yea, there’s still a lot to process through. But I am recognizing my limits and taking more breaks from work and school. I’ve begun asking for the time I need to care for me...unapologetically.”

reflexive journal entry // February 19th, 2022

There are so many stories I want to write. So many words I want to use. But I fall short. Every time.

There aren’t enough words. There isn’t enough language accessible to me that can depict the pain I see. So, I fall short. It isn’t enough. Every time.

I see images of Black mothers, crying out for justice while their tears of grief are overshadowed. The injustice is too much. The time given to them to mourn – is not enough. It is never enough. Every time.

I watch media take advantage of Black movements and capture footage of rage and grief. But their words don’t capture the pain. Their words are never enough. Every time.

I journal about my pain and grief in seeing lives lost. I never knew them and still I grieve. I feel rage, sadness, and pain. But I keep it in my journal because it doesn't feel safe to share out loud. No comforting texts soothe the pain. Their words feel more for their comfort than my benefit. They fall short of listening. Every time.

Kim Potter murdered Daunte Wright and the judge cries in sympathy for Kim who is living, and not for Daunte. Two years is her sentence. It is not enough. Justice reminds Black lives where we stand in their eyes. Every time.

I close my journal and cry. I want to share my words. They are never enough. Every time.

therapy session // Caring for the anger inside of me

“Wow.” Dr. Naomi seemed locked into my reading. I barely looked up from my journal to notice that her pen was not in her hand. I wonder when she stopped writing. She is always writing something.

I quickly look down at my lap again. “I wanted to just write what I felt in a way that made sense to me at the time.”

“Hmmm...in a way that made sense to you.” She let my words linger in the air.

“I guess in a way where my anger feels more protected. Where I feel less likely that my words and passion will get misconstrued. What bugs me so much about what happened is that they focused on one post, where I expressed myself. The story being told does not show all the parts of me. Like the email I sent them a couple weeks after this post, to share an antiracism resource for the conversations on race they wanted to have. Or the times I post on Facebook offering support and resources for others impacted in the communities where there is police brutality. The choice to focus on one post where I am explicit about why I am angry, is upsetting. I often express so many emotions – so why was anger the one that I am being chastised for? There is a place for every emotion, and I am fighting to feel ok with expressing more of mine in a healthy way.

Dr. Naomi chimes in, “Every emotion has its place. Hmm. I wonder though, which emotion you feel is the hardest to show or express.” She did that thing with her furrowed brow. The curiosity, though I suspect she knows what I meant. I wanted to see her because she was a Black woman like me, and I felt she often understood me without me having to overexplain myself. But here I find myself explaining my emotions over and over – as if I am apologizing for them.

“Anger.” Tears started to well up in my eyes. I’m not sure why. It’s like I know she understands me and yet insists that I hear my own words spoken back to me.

Silence.

Dr. Naomi, “I see some emotion coming up for you right now. How about we stay here and go into processing on the gaze spot you have found? Only if you want to...”

“Yes,” I exclaimed before she could finish. “Yes, I want to.” I don’t know if I wanted to, but something was welling up for me that I didn’t want to keep inside.

Dr. Naomi had her pointer ready and began guiding me in following the pointer with my eyes. Head very still because I like to do everything perfect, even my therapy apparently. She pulls the pointer towards the left and it feels like the room closes in and my eyes start to focus. Dr. Naomi is not slightly out of focus, but I sense her pause. She gets it. She gets me. She holds the pointer in that spot, asks ‘how strongly do you feel this right now?’ and I report as a ‘7 or 8’ [out of 10]. Then, she waits. Somewhere in the pause, I begin to speak freely. I know this part of the process has less guidance so I just start speaking, trusting that Dr. Naomi will hold space and time and assist if needed.

“The anger. It seems everyone is ok with every other emotion that allows me to appease and be docile, but sometimes I’m angry.” My face was tense though I kept my eyes locked on the brain spot. “I’m so fucking angry. I’m furious sometimes and I don’t know what to do with this anger but to express it. But I’m so conditioned to cater to others, that I have stopped writing it out, and that makes me angry! And I’m tired of holding it in to make White people comfortable. The shit that is happening should make us all angry. That’s what seems so unfair. It’s like we’re bothering them when we tell how it feels to see this in front of our faces and all over the news. It’s unavoidable. It’s tormenting. It’s not fair...When I think of the way Black mothers are expected to hold in their anger when they are grieving – I get more furious. I watch the press conferences; I see their restraint. And I hate it for them. And not only are they expected to hold in their anger, but they are also expected to tell everyone in the Black community how to behave as if they could control others. That makes no fucking sense...I think of Tamika Palmer, Breonna Taylor’s mama and watching her in interviews I can’t help but wonder when does she get a break from this to grieve? When is she able to let loose and just scream without being vilified!?! When can she live and mourn and shout, and cry, and just be without being watched? Her daughter’s death has made her a voice for the movement, but I imagine she’d much rather have her daughter alive.”

I pause because there is pain in my head, I realize I was screaming now. But Dr. Naomi was grounded, unbothered, and stable holding the pointer in the same spot – holding space – for me. Becoming aware of myself, I look at her face to search for fear or anger. She just tilts her head, waiting for me to keep going. To my surprise, I kept shouting, and crying, and voicing everything that was all jumbled together in my heart and my head. I kept sharing about the impact of my anger and how it interferes with my life. The pain was not alarming to me, but I was used to watching peoples’ expressions to monitor myself. But Dr. Naomi wasn’t afraid of my expression, my gestures, nothing. I felt something being released as I raised my voice. **LOUDER** and **LOUDER** – I felt the pain in my head fade.

My anger is not scary – I needed a space to let it out – to hear my voice with the cracks and the pain. There is a place for all of it. I can hear Dr. Naomi rooting for me as I carry on.

“That’s it, Rhemma. Keep going...”



Part III Critical Tale Realizations

What makes anger righteous?

Spiritually, I have learned that righteous is less about the accolades one can give themselves for being “right” rather I have come to believe that righteousness is the “right way of thinking of oneself and others”. This belief has been inspired from my GROW bible study group led by a friend of mine, Keisha. However, much like each aspect of my study, these tales are no different in that I rely on self-definition to guide the interpretation. In relation to these critical tales in particular, Part III represents my own personal reliance on understanding how to carry a righteous view of self that would impact my ability to view others appropriately as in – not as above or beneath me. Part III is also about finding safe spaces (Figure E7) to explore all the aspects of my identity – the Blackness, the womanhood, the spirituality – everything.

Ultimately what came to the surface for me in the experiences depicted in these tales is how much I internalized the belief that if I articulated how I felt, especially emotions of anger, that I feared being associated with the angry Black woman trope. Fear of mistreatment or retaliation were under the surface and closely linked to my earlier experiences of making mistakes that seemed to produce an over-the-top reaction from those around me. Over time, I

Figure E8

Excerpt from Drafted Letter to Christian Leadership

The allure of proximity to whiteness and white supremacy takes many forms. More plainly, your members cannot grow if white fragility shields them from responsibility...and their complicity aids in the perpetuation of harm against your Black members. What manner of authority is this that would support a white woman centering herself in my grief and pain regarding racial injustices? How was I made into the provocateur, the Angry Black woman, portrayed as unwilling to play nice, when in actuality, I was refusing to withstand the emotional and spiritual abuse?

experience through the lens of justice in a predominantly white religious space. In these tales, I documented and storied experiences that represent a breaking point for me that was occurring in multiple settings.

Figure E7

Facebook Post, February 22nd, 2021



associated being angry with being a “bad Black person” – and more desperately clung to the EBW trope that meant that I had to be the good girl who “[wrote] well for a Black student.”

Figure E8 is a snippet from a drafted letter sharing insight on my

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Epilogue: (Re)Creating Joy through Storytelling

There is a sweetness that soothes me when I venture into memories of Gay-Gay. Her patience, kindness, and silliness. More than anything, as I look over these narratives, I can sense how much I admired the attribute of joy she possessed far before I even had the words to articulate. Joy as a spiritual weapon is not contingent upon circumstances, but rather a deep sense of knowing self and belief in God that is anchoring. There are spiritual songs that say, *“this joy I have, the world didn’t give it, and the world can’t take it away.”* These words have much more resonance with me now than ever before. Through this introspective *mese*search, at first, I was looking for vindication in my stories. Perhaps even using the artifacts to provide conclusive findings of my humanity – that I matter, that I exist, that I have agency.



Figure E9

Facebook Post, February 19th, 2021



What I found instead was the deep wells of ancestral knowledge passed down from the women in my family, who learned from their mothers, how to foster a type of joy that is so individual and yet so collectively inspiring. I experienced a type of liberation from the nature of conducting a critical autoethnography.

Throughout the iterative writing and voicing process that I followed, I was able to contend with critical realizations regarding the internalization stereotypes of identity (ISI). Particularly, these series of tales addressed the various ISI that encourage Black women to succumb to unrealistic beliefs of strength, minimize anger and pain, and the burden of being educated but not valued.

Each iteration of my tales took me through a back-and-forth process of telling the full story, pulling back and pursuing the truth, engaging and

disengaging from vulnerability, and oscillating between covering and uncovering aspects of individuals implicated in my story. These tensions of storying my experiences were reminiscent of navigating my fragmented identity. Writing these tales caused me to search beneath the surface for what I believe(d) about myself as a Black woman and to recognize the subtle and vicious ways that these internalized beliefs show up in my life. This method of creative truth-telling was revealing and healing for me. Figure E9 was towards the beginning of my dissertation journey, as I was finding semblances of joy from the process of (re)membering.

My process was contemplative, expressive, spiritual, intuitively methodical, and joyfully creative. In moments, I was fighting to put myself back together again – towards a wholeness of self – while revealing the nuances entrenched in internalized stereotypes and how this impacted my (un)wellness as a Black woman completing a doctoral program. Knowledge is liberating and freeing and that is where I found the joy of continuing to bring this task to fruition. I hope my journey can guide others in taking a look back, to carry forward what is needed to move towards social change for all.

Appendix F: Endarkened Joy, Reflexive Writings

“If I ... Live” A poem by Rhemma Payne
(Originally written as “Unfinished” on March 14, 2021; Revisited on April 2, 2022)

Author's Reflection: I wrote this poem after witnessing the remarkably disturbing exchange between two cohosts on the daytime talk show, The View. I was trying to find the words for what I just witnessed and often when explanation feels impossible, I find refuge in poetry. I share this as a close to my dissertation as I feel that this critical autoethnography is the healing balm to the experiences I have (re)membered and when I revisited this poem on April 2, 2022, I was able to see phrases that I was once bound by but have not rekindled my joy in – my words – my song – my creativity and spirituality – my existence. As you continue reading my recommendations, I hope the sentiment that carries over is that recognition of pain does not negate the progress. However, the critical eye must evaluate what stories are not being told to portray progress without the depth of work necessary to get to true joy. My pain is a part of me as much as my happiness. Joy is a pathway I've found to hold both together in acknowledgment of what is necessary to (re)member to create lasting social change in the future.

Preamble

I'm left without much speech. My soul is not at peace.

If I ... Live

If I cry, I'm put to shame
If I laugh, I'm untamed
If I scream, I'm hostile
If I listen, I'm shy

If I shine, I'm too proud
If I speak, I'm too loud
If I dare, I'm too bold
If I break, I'm too weak and too old
If I smile, I reek with lust
If I yell, I forfeit other's trust
If I sing, It can't be my song
If I am right, I find a way to be wrong
If I walk, I must wanna be seen

If I live, I cannot also be free

What Does It Cost to Be Well?

How Can I Be Well If I am Not Whole?
Where Can All the Parts of My Whole Self Go to Fit In?
Who Do I Have to Show Me?
When Is It Safe to Be Me?
Why Do I Hide Myself to Be Seen?
What Does It Cost to Be Well?

A poem by Rhemma Payne
(Written on April 27, 2022)

Intersectional Wonderings

*Is it my choice if I get to be considered a woman before I am considered Black?
If I fight for the right to choose – do I forfeit my right to be considered at all?*

Reflexive Research Journal Entry dated 11/29/2021
