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Zariah Embry March 31, 2020

Educated Blackwoman, can you Self-actualize?

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Abstract

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As a pseudonym for socialization, education maintains structures of dominance. Education offers knowledge of obedience, and opportunity for some, but at fundamental costs for Blackwomen. In this project, I investigate the impact of the socialization of education on the self-actualization of Blackwomen. I argue the source of disparities in the wellness of Blackwomen is trauma-inducing socialization from their education. Existing factors to be considered include the societal climate which facilitates internalized gendered racialized oppression for Blackwomen as well as the strict set of stereotypes and expectations which hyper-label, hyper-surveil, and hyper-punish Blackwomen within the education system. From these factors, trauma is created and reinforced. Although the study results are intended to support or refute my hypothesis about the education system, results will not be generalized beyond the specific context of Blackwomen's experiences with education; this is the purpose of my investigation.

I will address literature from the following disciplines to demonstrate the historical precedents, the current climate, and any hopes for a better future: philosophy, African philosophy, Black philosophy, political philosophy, African American studies, anti-colonial and diaspora studies, Black feminist theory, Black queer studies, Black visual studies, comparative race and ethnic studies, critical race theory, critical media literacy, clinical psychology, social psychology, civil rights and social justice scholarship, cultural geographic studies, cultural theory, education theory, education policy theory, epidemiology, epistemology, gender bias research, intercultural communication and discourse analysis, legal scholarship, linguistics, political activist theory, psychiatry, social justice advocacy and scholarship, social theory, sociology, sociocultural linguistics, womanist theory. The overall goals of this investigation are to give an overview to the history of socialization and the education system, to address the movements, groups, and policies that have worked to improve the experiences of Blackwomen, and lastly to gain greater understanding regarding the current experiences of Blackwomen via the narratives from interviews. For the interviews, specifically, the primary aim is to collect the experiences of Blackwomen educated in America and the secondary aim is to compare these experiences to the research and my hypothesis to ultimately draw conclusions.

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Table of Contents

That's Not for *You*

"Sick and tired of being sick and tired" – Fannie Lou Hamer, civil rights activist[1]

Education is a pseudonym for socialization. From it, structures of dominance and oppression are maintained. Education *should* make way for the knowledge and opportunity to reach one's full potential, it is a practice of freedom.[2] Freire goes further to emphasize the praxis of education must be put to action and reflection upon the world in order to change it.[3] Contrastingly, basic needs go unsatisfied and the oppressive structures are maintained by the negligence of the education system. When some do grasp opportunity, the process brings trauma and establishes a knowledge of obedience. The educational process is more focused on demanding the respect and compliance than the false promises it projects.

The goal of this project is to show the impact of the socialization of desegregated education on the self-actualization of Blackwomen.[4] Understanding Blackgirls still faced a fashioning of proper, lady-like etiquette within Black spaces, I focus on American desegregated education as one major site of this oppressive socialization. Historical precedents set the structure for the current education system and demonstrate the agenda of our greater systems. My project is less about convincing anyone of this reality. Instead, I begin with the historical precedents and current implications to set the stage for my investigation of its impact on

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[1] Monique W. Morris, *Pushout* (New York: The New York Press, 2015), 21.
[2] Bell Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
[3] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1970).
[4] Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," Harvard Law Review 104, no. 8 (1993): 1719. https://sph.umd.edu/sites/default/files/files/Harris_Whiteness%20as%20Property_106HarvLRev-1.pdf. Harris' use of the term "Blackwomen" sought to clearly reflect the union of "Black" and "woman" as a unique identity with neither aspect primary of subordinate to the other. Harris' choice was influenced by the work of Kimberle Crenshaw's work on intersectionality.

Blackwomen. The effects of desegregated education do not seem to escape our awareness, yet we continue to play the game and pay the costs. I want to understand why we, Blackwomen, know better, yet continue to wear ourselves thin in the quest for success in a system which fundamentally opposes us.

The focus on the experience of Blackwomen is rooted in the *particular* gendered racialized oppression which follows from our intersectionality. Blackwomen carry the burden of our racial trauma and the limitations of misogyny. Our wombs are the site from which generational oppression is passed on. While many of the plights I will describe for Blackgirls and Blackwomen can be seen in other groups, this unique position of responsibility breeds existential concerns that are often ignored. I seek to shed light on our experience.

This introductory section will address how the past has informed our present and reveal the impossibility of anyone achieving self-actualization in the current system. Chapter One analyzes identity as a product of socialization and the specific forms of oppression that follow for Blackwomen. Education is a prime site for this interrogation on socialization in America; Chapter Two will focus on the construction, theory, and practice of our education system. Chapter Three reviews the attempts to improve the system while illuminating their inability to create sustainable, intersectional change. Rather than forming a path for self-actualization, our education creates and reinforces trauma. In Chapter Four, I will narrate the collected experiences of Blackwomen to gain greater understanding regarding the traumas learned during education. The last section will further summarize the research of this project and offer my concluding thoughts.

Historical Precedents Persist

Our present-day conditions are inextricably tied to the history of our global society. It highlights the events "we" are proud of in the history books and maintains them as permanent fixtures in our everyday lives. Invasion gave birth to the nation and formed a structure. The ideas and structures maintained by the system sit whiteness as the desired norm for power, progress, and success. Colonization and slavery were not events, these ongoing conditions created the rules and regulations which govern current American systems such as education and incarceration.

Institutions of oppression continue to control one's trajectory in our society.[5] Society's draconian treatment of slaves was justified by the manufactured innate savagery of the Black race.[6] The men were mythical creatures and could, therefore, take inhumane punishment; the women's libidinous nature justified using them as sex objects. While white America avoids the topic by abstracting this heinous institution, Black people live in the afterlife of slavery.[7] As a captive community, Black people are perpetually objectified by the constructions of society and serve as beings for others to survive.[8] Such an existence can only be understood as a crazy, distant nightmare for white people as they remain unconscious to the living ramifications of slavery.[9]

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[5] Angela Y. Davis, "The Meaning of Freedom," in *The Meaning of Freedom: And Other Difficult Dialogues* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2012), 141.
[6] Michael D. Harris, "Constructing and Visualizing Race," in *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representations* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2004), 33.
[7] Christina Sharpe, "The Wake," in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 15. Kindle.
[8] Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 67-68. doi:10.2307/464747.
[9] Davis, "The Meaning of Freedom," 138.

In this afterlife of slavery, the Black identity is up for public scrutiny; the societal value of Black people resides in their free – or very cheap – labor. Slaves needed to be physically and mentally chained to maintain the stability of whiteness.[10] In this twenty-first century, Davis emphasizes that we, as Black people, are continually objectified as property.[11] As Christina Sharpe described it, "in the wake [of slavery], the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present."[12]

Our current presence "in the wake" is reinforced by the fact and structure of objectification. This process holds Black immanent and imminent death as a normative, predictable and constitutive aspect of the United States democracy.[13] Once the persistent surveillance of slaves by overseers has now become the over-policing of any space with too many people of color. Present-day ghettos are nothing more than expansions of the slave quarters on plantations.[14] In each era, Black people resist, disrupt and, occasionally even, rupture the structures that bind us; we remain held by the "ship" because slavery is continuous and ever-changing.[15]

Abolition, as a form of "rupture," threatened the stability of whiteness and gave form to the Black codes and Jim Crow. These systems permanently excluded Black people from mainstream society and the economy. Although these regulations were outlawed by name,

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[10] Katherine McKittrick, "On plantations, prisons, and a black sense of place," *Social & Cultural Geography* 12, no. 8 (2011): 947-963. DOI: 10.1080/14649365.2011.624280.
[11] Davis, "The Meaning of Freedom," 145.
[12] Sharpe, 9.
[13] Sharpe, 13.
[14] Morris, 30.
[15] Frank B. Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). Quoted in Sharpe, 14.

they remain the backbone of the carceral system.[16] Looking at the intersection of race and gender, women of color are the fastest-growing population within the entire, international imprisoned population.[17] Each form of objectification increases our consciousness of our identities and being. Education, as it currently exists, has a substantial hand in this experience.

In the context of my writing, "education" and socialization synonymously describe the process which dictates one's trajectory from childhood to adulthood and normalizes their thoughts and biases. Knowledge and opportunity are indifferently assumed of education, but they rarely follow from the experience of it – for people of color, specifically as I will show, for Blackwomen. The education system, like all systems in the United States, reinforces privileges that inequitably determine one's worthiness to access the powers of knowledge and opportunity; in this way, I do not use the terms knowledge and opportunity lightly.

Each layer of discrimination and oppression has been perpetuated from historical precedents. Generally speaking, it is difficult for anyone to access all the necessary needs to reach self-actualization. However, as a group inundated by oppression, what does all this mean for the self-actualization of Blackwomen? This is the question I will investigate in this project.

How to Self-actualize

It is customary in American systems to determine the success of Black people by direct comparison with whites, self-actualization is no different. Much like the other structures in our society, self-actualization is a harmful framework that uses a hierarchical system to establish power dynamics. I do not employ the concept here to perpetuate this oppression, instead I

[16] Dorothy E. Roberts, "Prison, foster care, and the systemic punishment of black mothers," *UCLA Law Review* 59, no. 6 (2012): 1474-1501. https://www.uclalawreview.org/pdf/59-6-2.pdf.
[17] Davis, "The Meaning of Freedom," 144.

seek to reclaim the notion with juxtaposition between the ancient European concept and that established by the Black Panther Party's Ten-Point Program (1967).[18]

In the European sense, we look to the stages of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs – as outlined by McLeod.[19] These stages move from physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging, and esteem as the steps to self-actualization. The intention of this path is to progress from needs considered to be more easily attainable to those which require critical introspection. Although the Ten-Point Program is not written in the same order, it addresses the same needs; the lack of such an order reflects the nuance of access and the limitations which indiscriminately determine achievability for the Black community. Moreover, the Hierarchy of Needs is designed as a roadmap, while the Ten-Point Program is written as a list of demands which closely mirror the needs Maslow pinned. I straddle this line by offering the steps to self-actualization in juxtaposition with the current inability of satisfaction for Black people.

One begins each journey with the satisfaction of physiological needs – air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing, and reproduction. In majority white, middle class or wealthier neighborhoods, these are easily taken for granted. The segregation of neighborhoods has disproportionately affected access to these resources for Black people. Especially in the case of Blackgirls, they are often and unjustifiably separated from their families and placed in the

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[18] "Black Panther Party's Ten-Point Program," *UC Press* (blog), February 07, 2017, https://www.ucpress.edu/blog/25139/the-black-panther-partys-ten-point-program/.

[19] Saul McLeod, "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs" *SimplyPsychology* (2018). https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html. In what follows I draw on this due to the tangible, less conceptual manner by which McLeod breaks down the steps to self-actualization.

broken foster care system[20]. Under the category of reproduction, we can examine the historic and present eugenicist efforts to control the bodies of women of color. In her research, Subini Annamma found that pregnant girls of color are being criminalized; they are being placed in the same institutions as those with behavior problems for nothing more than carrying a child.[21] Subsequently, their ability to satisfy the next segment of needs – safety – is also compromised.

Safety needs consist of personal security, employment, resources, health, and property. There is a direct correlation between the threats to reproduction as well as the personal security and health of young Blackgirls. In addition to their own struggles, most of the girls Annamma interviewed had suffered numerous losses in their young lives resulting from a lack of healthcare. When the family's survival is placed on their shoulders, stress mounts and manifests as psychological disorders and "behavioral concerns." Their schools respond by casting down disciplinary actions that introduce the young Blackgirls to the school-to-prison nexus.[22]

The mental-emotional degradation that follows then further limits the ability of Black people to access the next level of needs – love and belonging. The third level of needs addresses one's friendships, intimacy, family, and sense of connection. From slavery to Jim Crow and now the "New Jane Crow,"[23] the separation of the Black family unit has been a staple for controlling Black life. The fracturing of Black families continues in the foster system – into

[20] Roberts, "Prison, foster care, and the systemic punishment of black mothers."
[21] Subini Ancy Annamma, *The Pedagogy of Pathologization: Dis/abled Girls of Color in the School-prison Nexus (*New York: Routledge, 2018), 51.
[22] Annamma, 35-36.
[23] Funneling young Blackgirls into foster care which increases their likelihood of entering the deadly carceral system.

which young Blackgirls can be placed with minimal evidence of actual danger in their homes.[24] Such separations leave relationship needs difficult to maintain, in personal life and the experience of Blackgirls in school.

Previously described obstacles of health, food, water, responsibility, shelter, and separation accumulate, enabling students to become truant.[25] In place of checking in on the girls who are truant, school officials push them out by disengaging them from the educational experience through suspension or expulsion.[26] Similarly, when officials determine the girls' behavior to be "problematic" – it is only exacerbated with the criminalizing indifference of *hyper-punishment*.[27] Blackgirls who are able to satisfy these needs then must achieve the fourth stage of esteem.

McLeod defines esteem as achieving respect, status, recognition, strength, freedom, feeling of accomplishment and self-esteem. The issues around attaining this level of need also stem from the differential treatment within the education system. During these crucial years in development, Black kids exhibiting the same behaviors as whites are labeled with disabilities and criminalized; contrastingly, the white kids are labeled as creative and encouraged for their unique brilliance.

More specifically, Blackgirls receive "benign neglect" from school officials.[28] Their teachers and administrators may not necessarily hate them, but do give up on Blackgirls quickly while nurturing, encouraging, and supporting their white peers. Thus, in addition to their non-

[24] Annamma, 34.
[25] One who stays out of school without permission. Merriam-Webster Dictionary.
[26] Annamma, 32.
[27] Annamma, 33.
[28] Annamma, 166.

academic responsibilities to family and self, now Blackgirls must also take personal responsibility for their academic performance. Although very little is in the control of children, they are blamed for their circumstances – family, neighborhood, community, identity, school, etc.[29] This breeds a lack of self-confidence which affects the self-esteem of young Blackgirls and the women they will become.[30]

The final stage in this process is to achieve one's full potential by self-actualization. Members of the Black community have another layer of difficulty in this process because the development of the Black sense of self is contingent on so many other factors. Society is currently controlled by and tailored for white people; in this way, it functions counter to the success of Black people even as we work to fit into white societal norms – like a "good" Western education.

Compliance, structure, and lessons in whiteness are the makings of a "good" Western education. The language, history, mathematics, economics, science, and general instruction are all centered on upholding the dominance of whiteness. To counter this whitening, a better education must expose the true nature of American society.[31] Therefore, an equitable education provides knowledge of self and a knowledge of our position in society. In the next chapter, I will discuss the education system beginning with the production of our socialized identities in the absence of knowledge and opportunity.

[29] Annamma, 117.
[30] Annamma, 42.
[31] "Black Panther Party's Ten-Point Program." Point Five

1

Constructions of Identity and Socialization

General Conception of One's Identity

As social beings, we cannot draw a concept of ourselves separate from our interactions. This has been described by many philosophers with a minimal difference to the ultimate conclusion. For Hegel, the very essence of being human lies in our consciousness that we have notions of other people just as they have a notion of us within them.[32] In this sense, we are beings for others more than for ourselves.[33] Taking a Hegelian approach, Mead describes one's personality as the result of the community to which they belong.

For Mead, a community is centered around one common interest and allows a person to understand recognition as the attitudes of others toward them and one another.[34] Honneth summarizes recognition as a sense of other, sense of self, and a sense of community – recognizing others recognizing you – in that sequential order; this is the mechanism for perpetuating socialization.[35] Hegel sketches one model of faulty recognition in the interactions between an independent and dependent consciousness. The dependent consciousness – the

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[32] Georg Hegel and Howard P. Kainz, "Introduction," in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1994).

[33] "Rarely fit together easily, neither do they work well alone." Chris Higgins, "Why We Need a Virtue Ethics of Teaching," in Philosophical Perspectives on Teacher Education, ed. Ruth Heilbronn and Lorraine Foreman-Peck (United Kingdom: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 61.

[34] George Herbert Mead and Charles W. Morris, *Mind, Self, and Society*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934).

[35] Axel Honneth, "Recognition and socialization: Mead's naturalistic transformation of Hegel's idea," in *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts,* trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 78.

slave – has a greater insight into identity than the independent consciousness – the Lord – because they accept the notion of themselves in other people.[36]

We can take the Lord to represent those of the dominant class. In our time, as in Hegel's white males have set the standards for ability and need. Tatum offers the interpretation of the self-image matching the image reflected by others; the correspondence makes them unconscious of their identity and unearned privilege.[37] On the contrary, those of marginalized identities are made conscious of their "inferior" identity because of the dissonance between their image within and that which is reflected by others.[38]

DuBois – a careful reader of Hegel – also interprets this experience for Black people as it mirrors that of the Hegelian slave. Regardless of true character, white society manipulates the image and markets negative stereotypes to limit the progress of Black people. Coining the concept of double consciousness, DuBois expresses the dissonance one feels as a result of their socialization as Black in this white society.[39] Hall describes the dissonance as an "internalization of the self-as-other" from which vulnerability and trauma follow for the marginalized class.[40]

The dominant class is socialized to fear and loathe those who are not them. The response is an expectation of responsibility on the oppressed to challenge the structure and

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[36] Georg Hegel and Howard P. Kainz, "Self-consciousness," in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1994).
[37] Beverly Daniel Tatum, "The complexity of identity: 'Who am I?'" in *Readings for diversity and social justice: An anthology on racism, sexism, anti-semitism, heterosexism, classism and ableism,* eds. Maurianne Adams, Warren J. Blumenfeld, Carmelita (Rosie) Castañeda, Heather W. Hackman, Madeline L. Peters, Ximena Zúñiga, 9-14. New York: Routledge, 2000.
[38] Tatum.
[39] W.E.B. DuBois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," in *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover, 1994). Original work published 1903.
[40] Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," in *Identities: Race, Class, Gender, and Nationality,* ed. Linda M. Alcoff & Eduardo Mendieta (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), 92.

teach the oppressors.[41] Moreover, after catering to the desires of the dominant class, marginalized groups are left with little to no energy and resources to see to their own problems – as the neoliberal logic[42] demands of them.[43] Because there are many elements at play, we should employ an intersectional lens to address the social factors which constitute a full individual. Intersecting identities are applicable to everyone but are not felt by everyone.

Society is ruled by a group of people – white, Protestant, elite, able-bodied, cis-hetero males – who do not experience the necessary dissonance to recognize their privilege. Lacking consciousness of their own intersectionality, the concept eludes them and allows their choice of any one aspect of their identity. One component is not sufficient to represent the complex fullness of an individual.[44] Therefore, those with multi-marginalized identities are more susceptible to the *negative* effects of investigations void of an intersectional lens. As the privileged majority identify with singular aspects, people with multi-marginalized identities are forced to follow suit. To counter the erasure and disempowerment by this either/or proposition, Crenshaw offered an intersectional identity of both/and.[45]

Intersectionality represents the construction of one's individuality by the cooperation of the major axes of social division – race, gender, class, etc.[46] Furthermore, an intersectional angle enables the exploration of the interactions and varying combinations of identities which

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[41] Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," in Sister Outsider (New York: Ten Speed Press, 1984), 114.
[42] Neoliberal logic argues one has only themselves to blame for their problems. In this way, marginalized groups must blame themselves for their situations and experiences.
[43] Patricia. H. Collins and Sirma Blige, "What is Intersectionality?" in *Intersectionality* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 18.
[44] Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," 120.
[45] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," in *The Public Nature of Private Violence,* ed. Martha Fineman and Rixanne Mykitiuk (New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.
[46] Collins, "What is Intersectionality?" 4.

differentially position an individual.[47] Hord argues that – in a Black philosophical sense of identity – an individual is never separable from their sociocultural environment;[48] the following section will unpack the construction of identity under conditions of racial oppression and the part of education in this process. In this investigation, intersectionality will be applied to create distinction between the experience of Blackwomen separate from white women or Black men. The intersectionality of Blackwomanhood is a unique position which creates a distinct process for socialization.

Intersectionality becomes a regrettable burden when one is stuck accepting the monolithic stereotypes set before them. Racial identity, like any other, cannot be treated as a monolith. Nonetheless, we should not fuel intergroup tensions by conflating or ignoring intragroup differences.[49] Crenshaw identified the failure of feminism and antiracism to interrogate the dominant structures of the other categories; ultimately, these groups replicate and reinforce the subordination of members that fall under multiple categories.[50] Within these emancipatory projects, people encounter *particular* rules, *differing* treatment, and *variable* implementation.[51] Blackwomen cannot rely on a singular identity to find relief for their unique needs. Unmet needs are exasperated during the socialization process.

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[47] Collins, "What is Intersectionality?" 8.
[48] Fred Lee Hord, Mzee Lasana Okpara, and Jonathan Scott Lee. "'I Am Because We Are': An Introduction to Black Philosophy," in *I Am Because We Are: Readings in Africana Philosophy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016). www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1hd18x6.5.
[49] Crenshaw, 1.
[50] Crenshaw, 5.
[51] Collins, "What is Intersectionality?" 9.

Socialization

Completely disengaged from the bases of nature, the dominant powers of society have dictated how we must exist within our identities via socialization. In this process, human differences are placed in simplistic opposition to one another to create a dominant norm to which all "inferior" identities are compared. Inferior divergence from the norms of society is distorted and misnamed, allowing the oppressor to disseminate images consistent with their objectives to retain dominance.[52] Lorde described "historical amnesia" as the precedent and structure for this maintenance of dominance, our profit economy, and evasion of responsibility for the oppressors.[53]

Everyone is a victim of the structures of racism, sexism, classism, etc. The power of the system lies in our complicity to the status quo. To be deemed acceptable, people are taught to see relationships with others as diminishing – rather than enriching – to our experience.[54] Children internalize the status quo in the sense that norms refer to how one *must* behave. Even as children, the intersectionality of their identities creates different norms to which they must abide. Enough exposure to these rules makes them "normal" and plays into the goal of socialization's cycle. When we accept these societal norms – doing nothing or promoting the status quo – the cycle of socialization is perpetuated. Thereafter, instead of who we *are* as

[52] Harris, 14.
[53] Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," 115.
[54] Bell Hooks, "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women," in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), 43.

intersectional, complex individuals, the sense of self develops based on how we *should* be[55] in order to form distinct groups.[56]

Full personhood is also neglected during the monolithic categorization of "anti-ism" groups in their "fight" for rights.[57] Dictating that "A [insert identity] person *should* be this and therefore *should* want this" will never bring about true equality. We all have varying levels of needs that cannot be satisfied by stratification[58] and tokenism.[59] Equality demands the dissolution of systems of dominance – not establishing a new dominant group to reverse the roles as they currently exist. [6061] This would require white, heterosexual, wealthy, protestant, able-bodied, men – the dominant group – to raise their consciousness to the real issues and actively reject the societal norms; such a radical event would break the cycle and go entirely against their socialization.

Blackness, according to whiteness

Blackness is required to give meaning to whiteness, yet whiteness is the standard displayed as the core of American culture.[62] McIntosh acknowledges her white privilege as something like an invisible safety belt. The dominance of whiteness operates under a veil of

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[55] Karen Ann Meyer and Lynn Fels, "Imagining Education: An Arendtian Response to an Inmate's Question," Canadian Journal of Education 36, no. 3 (2013): 305, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/canajeducrevucan.36.3.298.
[56] Na'im Akbar, telephone interview with author, tape recording, May 5, 1999. As cited in Harris, 14.
[57] Crenshaw, 5.
[58] The formation or establishment of social or cultural strata resulting from differences in occupation and political, ethnic, or economic influence. Oxford English Dictionary.
[59] The practice or policy of making merely a token effort or granting only minimal concessions, esp. to minority or suppressed groups. Oxford English Dictionary.
[60] Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies" (1988): 6. https://www.collegeart.org/pdf/diversity/white-privilege-and-male-privilege.pdf.
[61] Bell Hooks, "Feminism: A movement to End Sexist Oppression," in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), 18-33.
[62] Harris, 32.

invisibility which camouflages their permissive strength and power.[63] False images of marginalized groups augment the power of whiteness to establish unearned privilege.[64] In this fashion, the elusive white identity affords itself the privilege[65] of flexibility while creating derogatory images of the Black identity to suit their agenda.[66] Being white, your voice is always heard.[67] Being white, you do not need to have "the talk" with your children about systemic racism and its threat to their survival. White people can say and do anything without any personal responsibility to their race.[68] Being white is nothing more than being a human subject.

Being Black is subject to an objectifying examination from the white gaze. From this racial socialization, Blackness is either ignored or dismantled into bits and pieces of unattractive and animalistic features.[69] Fanon interrogates his Blackness as a simultaneous responsibility to one's body, race, and ancestors to counter such examinations.[70] This is a burden that leads to intragroup division as opposing archetypes of "good" and "bad" Blackness form. Inherited with these responsibilities is the ancestral and intergenerational pain of whips, chains, rape, and every other technique used to incite fear and complacency.

"Good" Blackness is labeled by one's ability to humbly succumb to the demands of whiteness; "bad" Blackness is designated to those who resist and bear the pain of punishment for their disobedience. Regardless of your label, Blackness is followed by an assumption of a

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[63] McIntosh, 5.
[64] Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," 122.
[65] White privilege was first named as "white-skin privilege" by Theodore W. Allen.
[66] Harris, 37.
[67] McIntosh, 2.
[68] McIntosh, 4.
[69] Hall, 91.
[70] Frantz Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness," in *Identities: Race, Class, Gender, and Nationality*, eds. by Linda M. Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), 64.

social pathology for higher crime rates, sexual promiscuity, etc. The accumulated pain, trauma, and "mentacide" [71] – mental genocide – can fester contempt for one's Blackness[72] which is masked by a pseudo sense of strength. The effects of racial socialization have very evident consequences which make it difficult to find and live out one's authentic self. This is the power of social construction in our society.[73] The following section will dive deeper into the socialization of Blackwomen.

Blackwomanhood

Struggle and Pain is the Rite of Passage

Wartenberg described an object's status as dependent on its public reception above its intrinsic features.[74] While his intention was to explain the value of artwork, this theory is quite easily related to the perception of the Blackwoman in a misogynoir society. Racism and sexism leave Blackwomen out of the white feminist agenda and Black nationalism, respectively.[75] Subsequently, we are pressured to subordinate our intersectional concerns for solidarity with a singular identity from an "either/or" lens.[76] Despite the lack of comfort or support from Black men and white women, Blackwomen are expected to give selflessly in the cause of others.

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[71] Akbar.
[72] Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye,* New York: Penguin Random House LLC, 1970. Kindle. Morrison introduces us to several "types" of Blackgirls and Blackwomen to express the variability in this identity. A common thread between the characters is a desire to assimilate to Whiteness and contempt for Blackness (directly or indirectly) with their inability to do so completely.
[73] Ernest Drucker, "Chapter 7: A self-sustaining epidemic: Modes of reproduction," in *A Plague of Prisons: The Epidemiology of Mass Incarceration in America* (New York: The New Press, 2013).
[74] Thomas. E. Wartenberg, *The nature of art: An anthology*. San Diego: Harcourt College, 2002, 4.
[75] Olga Idriss Davis, "A Black Woman as Rhetorical Critic: Validating Self and Violating the Space of Otherness," *Women's Studies in Communication* 21, no. 1 (1988): 77-78. DOI: 10.1080/07491409.1998.10162414.
[76] Collins, "What is Intersectionality?" 27.

The socialization of Blackwomen requires superhuman acts without recognition of sacrifice.[77] Society raises Blackgirls to be nice, quiet, pleasant and void of aggressive opinions.[78] As our bodies mature there is an implication of shame and guilt since we must close our legs and cover ourselves to maintain purity.[79] In general, it is the woman's job to tend to the fragile egos of men; we must compromise and make the appropriate sacrifices to ensure that we do not emasculate them.[80] This is the socialization of women, but as a woman of any additional marginalized identities, further limitations emerge.

Internalized gendered racial oppression teaches Blackgirls that their existence and wellbeing are secondary to the condition of others.[81] In *The Bluest Eye,* Toni Morrison chronicles the lives of Blackgirls, Blackwomen, and the people around them. Through the character development it remains clear that – in order to be acceptable – they must conform to the demands of white society. Blackwomen are objectified to the historical myth of hyper-sexualization to justify continued abuse and sexual exploitation.[82] From the Black womb, Cooper found Black inferiority to be born and bred – marking the source of Black oppression as the Blackwoman.[83]

To combat the violence, we tighten our behinds in fear of it swaying too free. Lipstick can never cover the entire mouth for fear of our lips being too thick. Edges must always be

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[77] Davis, "A Black Woman as Rhetorical Critic: Validating Self and Violating the Space of Otherness."
[78] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We should all be feminists* (New York: Vintage, 2014), 24.
[79] Adichie, 33.
[80] Adichie, 25.
[81] Morris, 174.
[82] Morris, 114-155.
[83] Brittney C. Cooper, "Introduction: The Duty of the True Race Woman," in *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 20. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt1q31sfr.5.

slicked to mimic the texture of beauty standards.[84] Even as women of other races begin to emulate the features of Blackwomen, we must continue to monitor our bodies. The amount of control we can employ determines if we are "good" or "ghetto" Blackgirls.

"Good" Blackgirls conform to the will of others. She is unconcerned with her wellbeing as she jovially caters to the needs of others. She possesses the superhuman strength to tolerate an "unusual amount of misery and heavy distasteful work."[85] Demurely and humbly, she carries the burdens of the world. This young, "good" Blackgirl grows into a "strong Black woman." As the title suggests, she has everything together without the need for supplementary help or resources.[86]

The social norms "good" Blackgirls must follow are tied to a narrow, white, elite middle-class definition of femininity. "Ghetto" Blackgirls deviate from these standards. Refusing to conform, these girls are deemed to be "out of control."[87] Their loud, flashy, hypersexual attitude subject them to ridicule and criminalization.[88] This is the coded language we receive from societal images – Black people as stupid, clumsy, ugly, dangerous in everything from cartoons to health and beauty products. In reality, these characteristics are defense mechanisms to be heard and to reject the doctrine of invisibility and mistreatment.[89]

The Blackgirl's struggle for survival becomes an accepted rite of passage as terms like "ghetto" are used to oppress.[90] The term "ghetto" *should* be a signifier for resilience to

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[84] Morrison, *The Bluest Eye.*
[85] Jonathan Gayles, "Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman Redux: Masculinity and Misogyny in Blade," *J Pop Cult* 45 (2012): 284-300. doi:10.1111/j.1540-5931.2012.00925.x.
[86] Hooks, "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women," 47.
[87] Morris, 10.
[88] Morris, 10.
[89] Morris, 19.
[90] Morris, 24.

socioeconomic, racial, and gender oppression. The weight of this responsibility can develop into self-contempt, envy, insecurity, and disillusion.[91] We hurt and feel pain just like white women, but we are not afforded the same privileges to leverage this as a selling point for liberty. The desire of white women to build sisterhood based on common oppression and shared victimization has built a barrier for non-white women of lower economic status.[92] As white women maintain eighty-eight percent of teacher positions,[93] this begins to give context to the socialization Blackgirls receive from their experience in education.[94] In the next chapter I will interrogate the construction, theory, and practice of this American education system.

[91] Morrison.
[92] Hooks, "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women,"44.
[93] Bettina Love, *We Want To Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2019), 130. Kindle.
[94] Christina N. Berchini, "Learning to Teach and Critical Pedagogy: Struggling with a 'Do as I Say, Not as I Do' Pedagogy," *English Education* 46, no. 3 (2014): 263. www.jstor.org/stable/24570904.

2

Practices of the American Education System

Replication of Societal Oppression

Our society has come to equate "education" with knowledge and opportunity. Education is a pseudonym for socialization which also functions in qualification and subjectification.[95] Knowledge and opportunity are limited by one's identities. Each level of our identity shapes our values, attitudes, social relations, biases, as well as the way knowledge is given and received.[96] Historically women, non-whites and people of lower socioeconomic status were denied the ability to read and write so the majority – white, landowning men – could control their access to information. However, all members of society grow through a system of education; our behaviors and manners are shaped by our *place* in society.[97] Education, as socialization, is a tool that brings vulnerable human beings[98] into society for the sake of compliance to authority. In this way, the ideals of colonization and the trauma of bondage have been sustained through modes of control such as our schools.[99] My investigation will focus on the American education system.

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[95] Gert Biesta, "How Does a Competent Teacher Become a Good Teacher?: On Judgement, Wisdom and Virtuosity in Teaching and Teacher Education," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Teacher Education*, ed. Ruth Heilbronn and Lorraine Foreman-Peck (United Kingdom: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 3-21.
[96] Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, 178.
[97] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, n.d. "Education."
[98] Colin Wringe, "Learning to Teach and Becoming a Teacher: *Techne* and *Phronesis*," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Teacher Education*, ed. Ruth Heilbronn and Lorraine Foreman-Peck (United Kingdom: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 26-27.
[99] Kristie Dotson, "On the way to decolonization in a settler colony: Re-introducing Black feminist identity politics," *AlterNative* 14, no. 3 (2018): 191. https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180118783301.

The education system is one of the longest standing influences on our lives – mandating our attendance until "adulthood."[100] School is the place that teaches us how we *fit* – or do not fit – into society. It is no surprise, therefore, that curricula often gloss over the transgressions of the past as well as immoral acts in the present.[101] Inclusion of a full instruction would draw connections and creative solutions for a brighter future. To the contrary, the type of learning students attain limits the expression of creativity for the sake of respect towards the total institution.

The United States Education System as a Total Institution

First defined by Erving Goffman, a total institution is used to describe structures such as prisons and mental hospitals.[102] With few exceptions, the education system models the guidelines for a total institution.[103] Traditionally speaking, it is a residential place cut off from the larger society – by choice or force – for a significant period of administrated routine.[104] Most schools are not residential, however, children are mandated to attend these institutions of routine. Schools attempt to cut minority students off from their less-educated rearing as a requirement for entry into normative society.[105] This process requires a loss of individual autonomy by denying them input for the regimented activities of monotonous school days.[106]

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[100] Morris, 25.
[101] Julia Delacroix, "Teaching Hard History: From the Beginning," *Teaching Tolerance* 63, (2019) 35-37.
[102] Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1961).
[103] Hugh Potter, Brian Boggs, and Christopher Dunbar, "Discipline and Punishment: How Schools are Building the School-to-prison pipeline," *The School to Prison Pipeline: The Role of Culture and Discipline in School* (United Kingdom: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017), 65-89, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/emory/detail.action?docID=4769098.
[104] Goffman, xiii.
[105] Potter, 71.
[106] Brian J. Boggs and Chris Dunbar, Jr., "An Interpretive History of Urban Education and Leadership in Age of Perceived Racial Invisibility," in *Handbook of Urban Educational Leadership*, eds. Muhammad Khalifa, Noelle

The conditioning of this total institution is training ground for students of color to enter the legal system as adults.[107] This school-prison nexus is driven by zero tolerance policies.[108]

The zero-tolerance framework for schools was set by the drug epidemic of the 1980s.[109] The *Gun Free Schools Act* (1994) introduced direct enforcement of student's good character choices; zero-tolerance punishment for students bringing in firearms was soon expanded to illicit drugs, alcohol,[110] insubordination, and disorderly conduct.[111] Policies such as *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) enforce singular measures for student achievement which disproportionately put youth of color at a disadvantage.[112] The "learning" that takes place is nothing more than a banking system in which information is deposited, stored, and requested later for assessment.[113] No connections are drawn outside the guidelines of the standards which contributes to the denigration of students' whole selves having space in the classroom.[114] As a result, test scores are lower and students' contact with the juvenile justice system is higher.[115]

Witherspoon Arnold, Azadeh F. Osanloo, and Cosette M. Grant (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 43-60. As cited in Potter, 66.

[107] Potter, 71.

[108] Chris Dunbar Jr., "For naught: How zero-tolerance policy and school police practices imperil our students' future," *ACLU of Michigan* (blog) February 4, 2015. https://www.aclumich.org/en/publications/naught-how-zero-tolerance-policy-and-school-police-practices-imperil-our-students.

[109] Potter, 72.

[110] David. R. Dupper, *A New Model of School Discipline: Engaging Students and Preventing Behavioral Problems* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 17.

[111] Insubordination is defined as a student who ignores or refuses to comply with directions or instructions given by school authorities. Refusing to open a book, write an assignment, work with another student, work in a group, take a test, or perform any other class or school-related activity not listed herein, refusing to leave a hallway or any other school area, or running away from school staff when told to stop all constitute insubordination. Disorderly conduct is defined as a student who harasses others or misbehaves in a manner that causes disruption or obstruction to the educational process. Disruption caused by talking, making noises, throwing objects or otherwise distracting another constitutes disorderly conduct. Behavior is considered disorderly if a teacher is prevented from starting an activity or lesson or has to stop instruction to address the disruption. Potter, 83.

[112] Morris, 33.

[113] Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* 5.

[114] Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress.*

[115] Potter, 73.

Zero-tolerance policies have missed the intended purpose of disciplinary action. In place of improving student behavior and creating a positive learning community,[116] schools create communities of compliance directed by a "do as I say, not as I do" pedagogy.[117] Education runs on competition,[118] gifted classes, ranking and other structures which leave *certain* students behind. We are conditioned to desire these divisive, elite opportunities; it is our unifying interest. Achieving anything in this toxic environment can cause a loss of one's authentic being due to the Eurocentric content and instruction of a "good" education. This incomplete story reinforces the elite, white, male class as the standard for the dissolution of one's misrepresented or unrepresented identity.

The education system as it relates to Black people is, simultaneously, a training ground for prisons requiring obedience and casting down punishment otherwise. This marks the continued robbery of the Black community by white society.[119] Black captivity, Black torture, and Black death are the bases for our economic system and the growth of the nation. Therefore, it is unsurprising to see incarceration – a new iteration of slavery and the Jim Crow era – woven into the socialization of the educational system. Instead of knowledge, opportunity, and employment, so many Black youths are funneled directly into prisons. The separation and mental-emotional degradation from the school-prison nexus further limit the ability of Black people to access the next level of needs – love and belonging, thus self-

[116] Daniel. J. Losen, "Discipline Policies, Successful Schools, Racial Justice, and the Law," *Family Court Review* 51, no. 3 (2013): 388-400.
[117] Berchini, 225.
[118] Biesta, 11.
[119] "Black Panther Party's Ten-Point Program."

actualization. These circumstances are largely due to the influence of unconscious bias in the education system.

Unconscious or Implicit Bias

Researchers Myra and David Sadker assess that there are seven forms of biases[120] – *invisibility, stereotyping, imbalance* and *selectivity, unreality, fragmentation* and *isolation, linguistic bias* and *cosmetic bias*.[121] I take *invisibility, stereotyping, imbalance* and *selectivity* to represent the more overt forms of bias. *Unreality, fragmentation* and *isolation, linguistic bias* and *cosmetic bias* are the more covert forms of bias used to feign progress.

Invisibility bias appears in the complete or relative exclusion of marginalized groups in the instructional materials, which is also reflected in the school officials' treatment of marginalized groups. *Stereotyping* uses distorted images to create simplified expectations for an individual. When the students are seen, they are accosted by the strict expectations of *stereotyping* to the detriment of their individual attribute. *Imbalance* and *selectivity* are similar in that they entail simplification and distortion but differ from *stereotyping* in that the affected entities are complex events and issues.

Unreality bias ignores unpleasant facts and events to promote the agenda of the majority in maintaining power. Added information – such as inserts distinct from the mandated material – is an attempt to give voice to excluded groups; however, maintaining their segregation from the general instruction creates *fragmentation* and *isolation biases*. *Linguistic*

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[120] David Sadker and Myra Sadker Foundation. "Seven Forms of Bias in Instructional Materials." Some Practical Ideas for Confronting Curricular Bias. https://www.sadker.org/curricularbias.html. The following descriptions of the seven forms of biases are based on the explanations given from this source.
[121] Collins, Cory. "The Thinking is the Work." *Teaching Tolerance* 63, (2019) 56.

bias appears in blatant and subtle terms which may alienate or trivialize marginalized groups. This form of bias dismisses students' "home languages" for acquisition of "academic language" in the sense of spoken language, body language, and unspoken rules.[122] Finally, just as a book cannot be judged by its cover, *cosmetic bias* reflects the "illusion of equity" promoted by countless institutions despite their continued discrimination. These biases give form to ideologies which target Black students from the white gaze.[123]

Microaggressions[124] are subtle and often unconscious acts of racial discrimination that make it difficult for students to trust staff. Microaggressions can mix with biases to accumulate anger toward school authorities.[125] This covert form of discrimination is meant to feel innocent. I have been challenged on everything from my upbringing to my accomplishments. To be so articulate, I must have been raised in a white suburban, well-off environment. The fact is, I was born and raised in a historically Black, low socioeconomic neighborhood to which most restaurants refused to deliver. I was fortunate to be raised by women who valued education and wanted me to reach my full potential. In my accomplishments, the validity of my position and intelligence have been questioned. "Oh really, mmm how did *you get* that?" I follow by

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[122] Jonathan Rosa and Nelson Flores, "Do You Hear What I Hear? Raciolinguistic Ideologies and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies," in *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World,* eds. Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (New York: Teachers College Press, 2017), 175.

[123] *Raciolinguistic ideologies* conflate certain racialized persons with linguistically deviant even when engaging in linguistic practices positioned as normative or innovative when produced by privileged White language users. The White gaze privileges White dominant perspective on linguistic and cultural practices of racialized communities. Rosa, 177.

[124] Chester Pierce, "Offensive Mechanisms," in *The Black Seventies,* ed. Floyd B. Barbour (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1970) 265–282.

[125] Hilary Lustick, "'What are we restoring?' Black Teachers on Restorative Discipline," *The School to Prison Pipeline: The Role of Culture and Discipline in School* (United Kingdom: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017), 113-133, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/emory/detail.action?docID=4769098.

explaining how I *earned* my various honors and accomplishments. Microaggressions reveal the ruthless stain that oppression has left on us all. My experiences with microaggressions and biases are not unique to my individual experience, patterns arise as one analyzes the experience of Blackgirls in socialization.

When analyzing the experience of Blackgirls in the school system is it important to note most teacher candidates – and subsequently the teacher force – are predominately white, middle-class women.[126] Historically speaking, white women have been instrumental in perpetuating degrading stereotypes about Blackwomanhood.[127] Blackwomen are marked as less intelligent, hypersexual, loud, sassy, ghetto domestics. Blackwomen and Blackgirls absorb these distortions of their identity which undermines their healthy development and performance in school.[128] To counter this construction of society, educators must begin by acknowledging and rejecting unconscious biases which impact their interactions with students. White women are often unable to do this internal work due to their complex, historic relationship with Black bodies – especially Blackwomen.

The historic position of white women in society has festered distrust in Blackwomen. This tension began on the plantation. Blackwomen have historically existed directly below white women in the social hierarchy and have experienced public segregation and private

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[126] Berchini, 263.
Nathern Okilwa, Muhammad Khalifa, and Felecia Briscoe, "Introduction and Overview," *The School to Prison Pipeline: The Role of Culture and Discipline in School* (United Kingdom: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017), 1-11, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/emory/detail.action?docID=4769098.
[127] Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* 97.
[128] Morris, 43.

integration. Blackwomen were good enough to prepare food and take care of children *for* white people, but they could not eat or drink in the same public spaces. This sort of trauma did not end with these women, it has been passed on for generations.

As bell hooks explains in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Blackwomen have a negative perception of white women. Blackwomen perform this infra-resistance – small, subtle acts of resistance that are beyond the oppressor's view or perspective – in response to the oppression from white women. Blackwomen resist their unintelligible, discriminatory labels by perceiving white women to be "childlike, self-centered postures of innocence and irresponsibility at the expense of black women."[129] Since the education system is dominated by white, middle-class women, this presents an immediate barrier between Blackgirls and their access to knowledge and opportunity. White women also sit compliant to the system as they perpetuate the discrimination and exploitation of Blackwomen. This system of biases is fueled by stereotypes which manifest in the criminalization of Blackgirls. Teachers, the school administration, district, and system-at-large have engineered a deadly triangle of *hyper-surveillance, hyper-labeling*, and *hyper-punishment* for Blackgirls through criminalization.[130]

Hyper-surveillance and *hyper-labeling* operate in tandem within the school system. Most notably described as the school-to-prison nexus, these are the processes to limit the knowledge and opportunity for Blackgirls. *Hyper-surveillance* occurs with the excessive scrutiny of Blackgirls' presence in the anticipation of problem behaviors or attitudes.[131] *Hyper-labeling*

[129] Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* 100.
[130] Annamma, 38.
[131] Annamma, 14.

provides the formal and informal naming of the students' undesired identity. As "at-risk" students, they must be naturally problematic and not care about school.[132] Therefore, truth spoken by Blackgirls is interpreted as problem behavior and attitude; similar outbursts from white male students garner praise.[133]

Blackgirls' mere presence becomes a problem because their appearance is "too distracting"; their outfits and hair constitute dress code violations, their body types, their accessories subject Blackgirls to hyper-sexualization which is politicized to maintain social order – to put them in their place.[134] In this way, labels and tools for surveillance are enforced to punish rather than protect its most vulnerable subjects. In the *anticipation* of wrongdoing or response to unwanted behaviors, *hyper-punishment* is the consequence that is unnecessarily harsh in comparison with peers.[135] As Annamma concludes, Blackgirls are overpoliced for punishment yet underserved for protection.[136]

Most often, the tactic used to punish students is withholding or refusing access to knowledge and opportunity. Morris categorizes the priority of discipline over learning as a reactive – rather than responsive – system that maintains inequality as the status quo.[137] The already reductive curriculum becomes overshadowed by punishments that remove "problem" students from the classroom. It is, therefore, unsurprising that Blackgirls are six times more likely to be suspended than their white female peers.[138] Intragroup, we see darker-skinned

[132] Annamma, 30.
[133] Morris, 88.
[134] Morris, 93.
[135] Annamma, 14.
[136] Annamma, 37.
[137] Morris, 178.
[138] Love, 6.

Blackgirls are three times as likely to be suspended than lighter-skinned girls.[139] This creates a hostile environment for instruction. Furthermore, school officials' biases are mirrored in the signs, symbols, and systems that simultaneously dictate Blackgirls' condition and label their families and communities as perpetually problem-ridden.[140]

The students and their families must exhibit the core values of respect and responsibility to the authorities of the school system and society-at-large.[141] Teachers and school officials do not offer the same courtesy to Black families, in return; instead of respecting and understanding their most vulnerable students, teachers tend to act and react as kids.[142] The perpetuation of dominant beliefs, unconsciousness biases, and unearned privilege through *hyper-surveillance, hyper-labeling*, and *hyper-punishment* instantiate barriers to knowledge and opportunity.

Not Learning

In a system which inherently prescinds, misrepresents, or delegitimizes their identity, it is sadly no surprise that the suicide rate for Black children between the ages of five and twelve is about twice as high as the rate for their white peers.[143] The trauma that pervades the education system can easily and quickly ebb the self-esteem of vulnerable individuals to lead to

[139] Love, 6.
[140] Coshandra Dillard, "Black Minds Matter: Interrupting school practices that disregard the mental health of black youth," *Teaching Tolerance* 63, (2019): 46.
[141] Gregg Suzanne Ferguson, "Black Educators, Black Students, Stonewall Jackson School: One of these does not belong," *Teaching Tolerance* 63 (2019): 20.
[142] Morris, 85.
[143] Dillard, 45.

spirit murder.[144] Negative or withdrawn behavior from Black students is labeled as a disciplinary problem in lieu of being seen as a potential sign of mental and emotional crises.[145] This reflects the age compression of Blackgirls by adultification, assigning adult-like characteristics to remove their childhood freedoms.[146] While labeling Blackgirls as predisposed to defiance, we must still know and do better than any of our more privileged peers to survive. The *hyper-surveillance*, *hyper-labeling*, and *hyper-punishment* entangled in this trauma also push Blackgirls out of the school system and into the cycle of incarceration. In this sense, certain children are expected and permitted to perform poorly in school.[147]

Zero-tolerance policies in the presence of uniformed school safety personnel mimic more of a prison model than an education model.[148] Subsequently, Blackgirls represent sixteen percent of the female student population, yet approximately one-third of all girls referred to law enforcement and more than one-third of all female school-based arrests.[149] Additionally, forty-eight percent of Blackgirls who are expelled are removed from their schools with no subsequent access to services for knowledge and opportunity.[150]

Students should participate in constructing the learning experiences from which they will ultimately be assessed.[151] In this approach, teachers must serve as advocates and models for social justice and equity, calling on their students to challenge normativity as well. This

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[144] Racism robs dark people of their humanity and dignity and leaves personal, psychological, and spiritual injuries. Patricia Williams, "Spirit-Murdering the Messenger: The Discourse of Fingerpointing as the Law's Response to Racism," University of Miami Law Review 42 (1987): 127.
[145] Dillard, 45.
[146] Morris, 34.
[147] Morris, 78.
[148] Drucker.
[149] Morris, 3.
[150] Morris.
[151] Berchini, 256.

mutual engagement with mutual responsibility can develop a learning community to promote self-actualization.[152] But, realistically speaking, educators are not self-actualized in themselves, so they merely enact rituals of control to center unjust exercises of power.[153]

Thus far, this project has explored the construction of Blackwomanhood, and the negative socialization perpetuated in our schools. In this analysis, the focus has been set on the active role of education in the oppression of Blackgirls; an adverse effect of the conditioning Blackgirls experience forms a resistance described as "not learning" by Herbert Kohl. Not learning occurs with children of marginalized identities who are required to learn from someone who does not respect or acknowledge their integrity. Several strategies of resistance occur mutually or following these sentiments.

Blackgirls may become angry and confrontational to protect their feelings against the insensitivity of their teachers.[154] The anger of Blackwomen is one either feared or misused for the salvation or learning of others.[155] Fear stalls productive dialogue, and misuse is regressive.[156] To gain a sense of "control" in the situation, Blackgirls will evade questions and directions.[157] In resistance to a loss of self, the students choose to reject the instruction altogether and "not learn."[158] The current climate of teachers and school officials respond to

[152] Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* 206.
[153] Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* 5.
[154] Annamma, 127.
[155] Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," in Sister Outsider (New York: The Crossing Press, 1984), 124-133.
[156] Lorde, "The Uses of Anger," 132.
[157] Annamma, 127.
[158] Herbert Kohl, *I Won't Learn from You: And Other Thoughts on Creative Maladjustment* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 12.

this resistance by aiding in the pushout of their most vulnerable students.[159] The more appropriate response is to create learning spaces that are collaborative, free of biases, and culturally aware[160] so all students can thrive without having to reject their own identity.[161] Such change is easier said than done as any attempts at progress often reveal other issues with the system; in the next chapter I will address these trials and shortcomings.

[159] Morris, 48.
[160] Potter, 88.
[161] Morris, 179.

3

Examining a system in need of disassembly

The preferable purpose of education is to create spaces for nurturing and engaging students in imagining new possibilities for the future.[162] Education *should* promote full development to counter attempts at dehumanization.[163] Despite this idealized conception of education, the system was designed to stifle the self-actualization of most involved. School, as a total institution, is used to socialize children into predestined positions. This chapter will explore the efforts to change our bleak reality and move toward what was insincerely promised.

To match an enlightened sense of knowledge and opportunity, students should encounter a union of mind, body, and spirit.[164] Active participation and mutual aid support the growth of students and educators, alike, in their process of self-actualization.[165] Students not only learn from what is said, but how it is said and what is done.[166] Therefore, the continuous self-cultivation of teachers is necessary – while not sufficient – for the mirrored growth of students.[167]

To break down the accumulated distrust of the system,[168] narratives in instruction should affirm the diversity of experience and deny privilege to any one voice.[169] Participating in

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[162] Meyer, 313.
[163] María Del Carmen Salazar, "A Humanizing Pedagogy: Reinventing the Principles and Practice of Education as a Journey Toward Liberation," *Review of Research in Education* 37 (2013): 128, www.jstor.org/stable/24641959.
[164] Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 14-15. From pedagogy of Thich Nhat Hanh.
[165] Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* 54.
[166] Biesta, 10.
[167] Higgins, 60.
[168] Annamma, 127.
[169] Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* 84

this exchange ignites the possibility of futures outside the paralyzing confines of stereotypes;[170] simultaneously, students will become receptive to understanding and growing pleasure in the process of learning.[171] Furthermore, the teaching force should better mirror the growing populations of minority students.[172] The barriers to creating this environment in the current system resides in the multiplicity of intentions and pedagogies at every level; this is especially true for the teachers within pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Teacher Education

Mind the Gap

While most resources are poured into closing the "achievement gap," there is a troubling teacher education gap.[173] Not only is there discontinuity in teacher education programs, there are also striking discrepancies in their motivations.[174] Educators have failed to question their motives in the profession – as is demonstrated within their instruction.[175] The "achievement gap" formed as a result of an accumulation of teachers using students and sacrificing their own growth for meeting quotas.[176] Moreover, education – as a teleological practice[177] – is predominantly viewed as a means for achieving autonomy through skill

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[170] Meyer, 309.
[171] Wringe, 28.
[172] Okilwa, 1-11.
[173] The teacher education gap is due to their limited interaction with people of color and the biases that infiltrate their classrooms. In addition to their sheer ignorance, teachers are inundated with public perception and literature which says dark kids are in trauma, at-risk, underprivileged, and in an achievement gap. Love, 127.
Gloria Ladson-Billings, "From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools," *Educational Researcher* 35, no. 5 (2006): 3-12.
[174] Higgins, 57-70.
[175] Meyer, 315.
[176] Higgins, 58.
[177] Biesta, 7.

acquisition, participation in the economy, and social well-being.[178] Focusing on these goals, ignores the intended reciprocity of the process.[179] Teachers' competence becomes measured by performance;[180] accordingly, students are used as a means for validation via standardized tests.[181] Such practice conceives education in terms of particular judgements to the benefit of the system rather than students – their well-being and flourishing are lost.[182]

For teachers, their experience in mindful education manifests in skills[183] beyond the procedures set before them.[184] Skill requires a competency that moves from practical knowledge of their job description and intent to how they execute in their practice.[185] It requires a transformation not in acquiring knowledge, but becoming wise in teaching through experience and sound judgement.[186] To be sound in judgement, teachers must do the work to become culturally responsive to the needs and circumstances of their students.

Language and culture are quite intrinsic to one's sense of self. Consequently, culturally sustaining pedagogies[187] are intrinsic to an education that honors and dignifies its students to flourish.[188] Culturally sustaining pedagogies are informed by critical inquiry and conscious

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[178] Meyer, 301.
Ruth Heilbronn, "Wigs, Disguises and Child's Play: Solidarity in Education," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Teacher Education*, ed. Ruth Heilbronn and Lorraine Foreman-Peck (United Kingdom: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 78-79.
[179] Higgins, 64.
[180] Biesta, 4.
[181] Heilbronn, 87.
[182] Biesta, 16-17.
[183] "Knowledge by acquaintance." Wringe, 30.
[184] Wringe, 25.
[185] Biesta, 3, 17.
[186] Biesta, 18-21.
[187] "Teaching that perpetuates and fosters linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation." Django Paris and H. Samy Alim, *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World,* (New York: Teachers College, 2017).
[188] Mary Bucholtz, Dolores Inés Casillas, and Jin Sook Lee, "Language and Culture as Sustenance," in *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World*, eds. Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (New York: Teachers College Press, 2017), 43-55.

respect of intersectionality.[189] Educators must also be willing to frequently re-assess youth culture in addition to historical aspects.[190] Culturally relevant pedagogy[191] has similar goals that are often corrupted when the concept of success is narrowed to reside within the white gaze.[192]

Achieving an elevated level of positive social transformation requires an alternative to punishment.[193] An environment responsive to the varying customs of students must also be forgiving as cultural clashes arise. One proposal is to eliminate subjective behavioral consequences – such as their immediate removal from the learning environment.[194] Program adjustments of this nature come with their pros and cons.

Policies! Programs! Progress?

Government intervention in the education system, has historically disenfranchised minority access to knowledge and opportunity. Policies have strategically built a total institution[195] which tends to hinder the success of more students than it helps. In the 1990s the nation experienced a "moral panic."[196] Programs began to sprout sporadically, and in early

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H. Samy Alim and Django Paris, "What is Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and Why Does it Matter?," in *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World,* eds. Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (New York: Teachers College Press, 2017), 1.

[189] Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, "Intersectionality as Critical Inquiry and Praxis," in *Intersectionality* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 39.

[190] Gloria Ladson-Billings, "The (R)Evolution Will Not Be Standardized: Teacher Education, Hip Hop Pedagogy, and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0," in *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World,* eds. Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (New York: Teachers College Press, 2017), 147.

[191] Culturally relevant pedagogies focus on student learning, developing students' cultural competence, and supporting their critical consciousness.

[192] Ladson-Billings, "The (R)Evolution Will Not Be Standardized: Teacher Education, Hip Hop Pedagogy, and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0," 142. Alim, 13.

[193] Meyer, 310.

[194] Potter, 87.

[195] See "A Total Institution" in Chapter 2 for more information.

[196] Kathryn Herr and Gary L. Anderson, "Violent Youth or Violent Schools? A Critical Incident Analysis of Symbolic Violence," *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 6, no. 4 (2010): 415-434.

2014, the United States Federal Departments of Education and Justice launched a joint Supportive School Discipline Initiative to improve the learning environment.[197]

In response to this epidemic, many have established programs and adjustments to practice. Although I commend the programs I have seen sprawling up in my own community, and nationally, they often ignore or intensify the intersectionality of students' oppression. This is seen in programs directly in their name or mission,[198] as well as indirectly in the underlying goals.[199] Such programming then creates a narrow scope which is typically deficit-based.[200] Critical mentoring attempts to broaden the scope, displaying their unique, intersectional culture as an integral piece to their success.[201]

Mentorship

The most salient difference between mentoring and *critical* mentoring is the extension past academic performance and behavior; there must be a critical evaluation and confrontation

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[197] *United States Department of Education Website,* April 15, 2014, http://www.ed.gov. As cited by Lustick, 117.

[198] We find an example in President Barack Obama's 2014 initiative, My Brother's Keeper, and the subsequent #WhyWeCantWait campaign. These programs focused on guiding Blackboys to positive life outcomes, which failed to address the stunted opportunities and other injustices facing Blackgirls. Collins, "Intersectionality as Critical Inquiry and Praxis," 52. In 2015, Melissa Harris-Perry and Valerie Jarrett, the director of the White House Council on Women and Girls, responded to these omissions with a historic summit at the White House called "Advancing Equity for Women and Girls of Color. Brittney C. Cooper, "Epilogue," in *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 145, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt1q31sfr.10.

[199] Briscoe created an, otherwise, great list of adjustments to improve the application of restorative justice outside of the targeted focus on cultural responsiveness to Black, Brown and lower income *boys,* countering discourses for Black, Brown and lower income *boys.*
Felecia M. Briscoe, Nathern S. Okilwa, and Muhammad Khalifa, "What We Can Do Right Now: What Needs Further Research?", *The School to Prison Pipeline: The Role of Culture and Discipline in School* (United Kingdom: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017), 204, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/emory/detail.action?docID=4769098.

[200] Valerie Kinloch, "'You Ain't Making Me White': Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies and Black Youth's Performances of Resistance," in *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World,* eds. Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (New York: Teachers College Press, 2017), 25-39.

[201] Torie Weiston-Serdan, "Culturally Relevant Mentoring Practices," *Critical Mentoring: A Practical Guide* (Dulles: Stylus Publishing, 2017), ProQuest Ebook Central, 38.

of the systemic oppression of marginalized students.[202] The school-based mentoring programs fail as they focus on assimilating their protégés[203] instead of attacking the inequitable system *with* them. Students spend most of their time in school, and yet some of the better examples of critical mentoring exist in the community.[204]

It is irrefutably problematic that students must join outside programs to receive adequate support and instruction. Nonetheless, in these settings, students are given space to name their trauma – provoked by the school and otherwise – to then be empowered in their acquisition of knowledge and opportunity.[205] Programs both within and outside of schools become disempowering when the program has the title, purpose, and/or practices which argue they can *fix* students in order for them to belong.[206] Here lies the precarious balance between humanizing and dehumanizing mentorship.

Youth participatory action research (YPAR) models youth-centrism as a safer, more effective angle for mentorship.[207] This model entails centering youth voices in the organizational structure, processes and practices. As collaborative partners in the work, students can inform their experience in mentorship – academically, socially, etc.[208] Programs must then be careful not to push all their work of planning and implementing the mentorship

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[202] Torie Weiston-Serdan, "A Collective Call to Action," *Critical Mentoring: A Practical Guide* (Dulles: Stylus Publishing, 2017), ProQuest Ebook Central, 86.
[203] Alim, 3.
[204] Weiston-Serdan, "A Collective Call to Action," 85-87.
[205] Weiston-Serdan, "A Collective Call to Action," 85.
[206] Weiston-Serdan, "A Collective Call to Action," 89.
[207] Torie Weiston-Serdan, "Youth Centrism," *Critical Mentoring: A Practical Guide* (Dulles: Stylus Publishing, 2017), ProQuest Ebook Central, 21.
[208] Weiston-Serdan, "Youth Centrism," 28.

onto the very students they are trying to serve. With new waves of mentorship, schools are also seeking restoration.

Restoring Order… I mean Justice

Restorative justice is a newer method for correcting undesirable behavior. Schools consider this to be an alternative to exclusion.[209] Often, there is an implication of "saving" the students from their environments or cultures which can breed feelings of shame within the students.[210] Word-choice is very important. The restorative programs surveyed by Briscoe had three primary goals. First, to evaluate the number of prevented suspensions, conferences and the successful building of trust and addressing bias. Secondly, the cultural responsiveness and antibias in the program's staff. Lastly, they use mediation, reconciliation as well as recognizing "conflict and misbehavior as breaches of trust."[211] This program is worded very carefully.

By and large, the program is focused on limiting the removal of students from the learning environment. There is a nod to cultural sustaining pedagogy, yet it is surrounded by coded language that builds trust to use against the students.[212] As a "breach of trust," students deviating from normative behavior are made responsible for themselves as well as the common good of the school environment.[213] In contrast, students' expectation of participation within

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[209] Lustick, 132-133.
[210] Lustick, 125.
[211] Briscoe, 201.
[212] As discussed in previous sections, cultural differences create diversity in "appropriate" behavior. Maintaining a White-centralized code of conduct then holds students of color at a disadvantage and therefore maintains their higher likelihood to encounter school officials for "misbehavior."
[213] Joshua Bornstein, "Can PBIS Build Justice Rather than merely Restore Order," *The School to Prison Pipeline: The Role of Culture and Discipline in School* (United Kingdom: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017), 135-161, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/emory/detail.action?docID=4769098.
Especially in the case of microaggressions from school officials, students will take offense and accumulate anger that is eventually released against the teacher and others. From Lustick's interviews with Black educators, they found that, regardless of the school response (suspension, restorative practice or a combination), the emphasis

the code of conduct is most often in a passive tense, removing their ownership of the learning experience.[214] This does not support the full *inclusion* of students. Hence, such practices are intended to restore *order* rather than justice.[215] A typical solution to ineffective applications of programs is to use Black teachers as the parties solely responsible for Black students, as well as minority students overall.

In 2008, Gregory and Ripski determined that, more than any other racial group, the behavior of Black students was more strongly correlated to students' trust in their teacher.[216] This can equate to greater personal and emotional relatedness that generates increased academic motivation, engagement, and achievement.[217] Self-worth and self-esteem are largely connected to achievement,[218] thus, placing teachers that "look like them" in front of students can provide firm footing for humanizing development. However, Black educators often offer their "secrets"[219] to more holistically improve the school environment. Their suggestions are praised but not implemented.[220] Subsequently, Black educators are tokenized as the *only*

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remained on the student needing to adhere to the school's core values while the adult's provocation went unnamed. Lustick, 129.

[214] Bornstein, 147.

[215] Briscoe, 195-204. Lustick, 114, 122.

[216] Anne Gregory and Michael B. Ripski, "Adolescent Trust in Teachers: Implications for Behavior in the High School Classroom," *School Psychology Review* 37, no. 3 (2008): 337-353.

[217] Andrew J. Martin and Martin Dowson, "Interpersonal Relationships, Motivation, Engagement, and Achievement: Yields for Theory, Current Issues, and Educational Practice," in *Review of Education Research* 79, no. 1 (2009): 327-365, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40071168.

[218] Martin, 330.

[219] Black educators understand the differences between their shared culture with Black students and the White) culture of the school environment. They are then able to teach students the concept of code-switching without diminishing their home culture. Lustick, 126.

[220] Black social worker proposed to the administration that school counselors attend community-building circles and follow-up with any student who exhibits signs of trauma or emotional distress (which led to conflict or fights). Many student-staff relationships lacked the fundamental level of trust that would allow them to "restore" or authentically grow through "talking out" conflicts. The goal of the circles would be to improve these relations through work on the part of the school officials. Without implication, those who already had trusted relationships

people that can successfully restore order. With incorporation of connective instruction, *all* educators can do the necessary work to elevate every student to achievement.

Through connective instruction the relationship between student and subject matter, teacher, and instruction compose a sense of classroom community.[221] Sense of community is connected to one's sense of self-efficacy which in turn improves student achievement.[222] Forming these relationships is then important in developing mutual sociopolitical consciousness. Issues cannot be taught in distance from the students, rather brought into context that more directly impacts them.[223] Educators must not define their students solely by their suffering, [224] avoiding deficit-based narratives.[225] This allows historically marginalized students to be in a space of normality within their learning community without replication of oppression.[226]

Gerald Vizenor coined the term *survivance* to denote the tradition of survival with resistance that outwits dominance.[227] Radical abolition calls for those in power – white, protestant, middle-class, cis-heteronormative men – to join as co-conspirators in the quest for

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with the students, the Black educators, earned many extra responsibilities in facilitating restorative practices. Lustick, 127.

[221] Martin, 345-352.

[222] Martin, 350.

[223] Ladson-Billings, "The (R)Evolution Will Not Be Standardized: Teacher Education, Hip Hop Pedagogy, and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0," 146.

[224] Casey Wong and Courtney Peña, "Policing and Preforming Culture: Rethinking 'Culture' and the Role of the Arts in Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies," in *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World,* eds. Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (New York: Teachers College Press, 2017), 117-135.

[225] Eve Tuck, "Suspending damage: A letter to communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (2009): 409-428.

[226] Ladson-Billings, "The (R)Evolution Will Not Be Standardized: Teacher Education, Hip Hop Pedagogy, and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0," 155.

[227] Gerald Vizenor, "Fugitive poses," in *Excavating voices: Listening to photographs of Native Americans,* ed. M. Katakis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaelogy and Anthropology, 1998), 93.

radical change.[228] The first step is to critically examine, challenge, and dismantle one's privilege;[229] the next step is to apply their position to action[230] – careful not to overshadow or speak *for* the groups they intend to help.[231] Educators must understand that cultivating safe, inviting, and supportive learning environments is *their* responsibility.[232] These should be spaces of community cultural wealth to which educators hold themselves as well as their colleagues accountable.[233] Without the proper foundation, exiting the pre-Kindergarten – twelfth grade education system can be a frightening endeavor; nothing can be more anxiety-provoking as the question, "so what are you doing next, after graduation?"

What's next for you?

Although the success-driven education system reinforces a socialization process steeped in whiteness, the high school graduation rate is at an all-time high.[234] Our reaction is to rejoice at the progress of society, yet the prospects for students after graduation are exacerbating the wealth gap. Students that do not go on to college earn approximately half of the annual income of their college-educated peers and a third the income of peers who attain advanced degrees.

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[228] Keenanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "The Combahee River Collective Statement," in *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), 15-27.
[229] Love, 122.
[230] Dillard, 47.
[231] Dillard, 46.
[232] Dillard, 48.
[233] Communities of cultural wealth are built on the following tools: aspiration (hopes and dreams despite structural barriers), linguistics (storytelling), family wisdom/stories/traditions, social capital (using network for accessing colleges and other social institutions), navigation (helping people of color maneuver hostile spaces to success), and resistance (recognize their commitment to fighting for justice and abolitionist work). Tara J. Yosso, "Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 8, no. 1 (2005): 69-91.
[234] Kristen Loschert, "Why A High School Diploma Alone No Longer Guarantees Career Success" *Alliance for Excellent Education.* April 7, 2017. https://all4ed.org/why-a-high-school-diploma-alone-no-longer-guarantees-career-success/

Moreover, we are creating fewer jobs for people with GED or high school diplomas which maintains the cycle of poverty for many families. Thirty-five percent of those from low-income families earn postsecondary degrees compared to seventy-two percent of those from affluent backgrounds. Looking to race, the gap is still fifteen percent between white and Black people.[235]

For those Blackwomen able to overcome the odds and enter academia they are confronted with another barrier, the enigma of "Black women as intellectuals."[236] We have addressed the history of Blackwomen as caregivers and silent strongholds for the Black family unit;[237] the "proper" role of Blackwomen in society does not include intelligence. Brittney Cooper unpacks this conceptual anomaly as a threat to the stability of our white, male dominated society. Blackwomen intellectuals upend the traditional role by giving us face and voice. Bringing Blackwomen into the light of high achievement creates cultural anxiety.[238]

The next chapter will explore the narratives of Blackwomen having matriculated through the American education system. As it has been our task, we will explore the potential connections between their experiences as it pertains to their socialization, life-trajectory, and well-being. The variety of geographical, socioeconomic status, level of education, institutions, and careers will be a starting point for the ultimate question. Can Blackwomen self-actualize in the United States education system or beyond?

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[235] Loschert.
[236] Brittney C. Cooper, "The Problems and Possibilities of the Negro Woman Intellectual," in *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 122, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt1q31sfr.9.
[237] Cooper, "The Problems and Possibilities of the Negro Woman Intellectual," 124.
[238] Cooper, "The Problems and Possibilities of the Negro Woman Intellectual," 125.

4

In this chapter, I step back from the research and the experts to perform a human check-in. It is easy to get wrapped up in numbers and theories enough to forget about the subjects of this study – Blackwomen. I am a subject myself. This inquiry has as much to do with my desire to improve the lives of other Blackwomen as it has to do with improving my own life. The painful disparities for people that look like me and share in my experiences made me numb to my research, pessimistic of any measures offering relief or genuine change. Through the interviews I conducted, my perspective on Blackwomanhood expanded; I noticed the patterns of my subjects reflect in my own experiences and the potential we possess for healing ourselves. This may simply be another form of survivance, wellness in opposition to the system. It is not enough to end the cycle, but it provides some relief for today.

Check-In

The narratives we explore in this chapter derive from six women. First, Annie was born and raised in North St. Louis, Missouri; she is currently 38, a hospital CEO, married, and 6 months pregnant with her first child. Carrie is a native ATLien (Atlanta, Georgia); at the age of 33 she oversees international relations for the Predominantly White Institution (PWI) she attended for undergraduate and graduate education. Hailing from the Southside of Chicago, Illinois, Alicia is a 24-year-old master's candidate for climate and society at a prestigious PWI. Ciara, 24, is from San Diego, California and works as an advocate at a domestic violence shelter. Emma, 24, is a native New Yorker who is finishing her last year at a Historically Black College/University (HBCU). Finally, JM comes from small town Laurel, Mississippi; at 22-years-

old she is completing her last semester of elementary education while student teaching the first grade.

Over the next few sections I will weave their stories together, drawing on the unique experiences as well as the common themes. Take note of their variety and the indiscriminate manner by which the intersectionality of Blackwomanhood influences their experiences in education and beyond. Each of our subjects were asked the same series of questions.[239] In response to several of the questions, our subjects referenced the adage of working twice as hard to be considered half as good. We begin our analysis by unpacking this concept as we walk through the identity discovery of Blackwomanhood.

Twice as Hard, Half as Good

Experiences that unite us

One of the first questions I asked participants was to describe when they began self-identifying as Blackwomen and who or what made them aware. Asking myself this question, I do not remember a time where I did not identify as a Blackwoman. Accordingly, I assume my earliest realization came from my family. As a light skinned Blackgirl very proud and aware of my heritage, I recall my Blackness being questioned in kindergarten during recess.

The diversity of my elementary school spared me the anxieties of being the "only one" in my classes, however I soon realized that all Blackness is not perceived the same outside my family. My Black peers insisted that I was "mixed" (biracial), something I had no concept of at the time. Five-year-old me simply understood that my *Black,* multigenerational home was made

[239] Interview questions are included at the end of Chapter 4, page 83

up of a variety of skin tones. Therefore, my lighter complexion did not signal difference or preference. It has been since this experience that I began to understand what my particular experience in Blackness means. A common thread between my own story and those of my participants is an influence from family and education.

Similar to my experience of self-identity without a conscious decision, Carrie attributes her grandmother and mother to bringing awareness to her Blackwomanhood. To her, it felt like something she has always known. From a young age, Carrie's family taught her about the importance of knowing one's history to gain a sense of self and knowledge of place – this was especially important growing up in a historic city like Atlanta, GA. This form of self-discovery was not interrupted as she matriculated. For other Blackwomen, the realization of their identity may come from the racism of whiteness.

Alicia noted that her identity awareness began with socialization around white people. Around five-years-old, Alicia's older brother – seven or eight-years-old at the time – almost lost his life to gun violence near their home on the Southside of Chicago. Alicia's mother moved them to the suburbs. In this introduction to white people, Alicia realized she was visibly and physically different. Alicia, her older sister, and older brother were the only Black students in the entire school; most of her peers would not hang out with Alicia because she did not talk or look like the white students. She was often "othered," but an instance that stood out was a playdate with her white best friend, Kim, around the age of six or seven. When Alicia arrived at Kim's house, Kim was pulled aside by her mother and asked if she had other friends to play with. Both Kim and Alicia were taken aback by the question; it was not until Alicia relayed this

experience to her own mother that it became clearer. There was something undesirable about Alicia, and it was based in her Blackness.

In the 4th grade, Emma experienced a racist comment from a white male peer. Matriculating in a diverse educational environment in New York, this was Emma's first experience. Although the particular comment from elementary school escaped her memory, the feeling persisted and was repeated during her senior year of high school. In this classroom she was both the only Black and female student in the room. The same white male student from the fourth grade asked Emma, specifically, if the class could watch *Django*; their teacher also turned to Emma, as if to cosign the request for permission. They made her feel hyper-visible, so Emma walked out. Having become aware of her Blackwomanhood in the fourth grade, Emma had also discovered the associated stereotypes. Keeping these in mind, Emma decided not to retaliate for fear she would have been labeled the aggressor.

Annie recalls her earliest incidences of racism as the sites for self-identification as a Blackwoman. These incidences occurred in the seventh grade, during which Annie attended an all-white school in St. Louis. The racism of her white peers gave her and the other Blackgirls an acknowledgement of their difference and a platform to build relationships that have lasted over twenty years. Together, this group of Blackgirls "carved their identities." The foundation Annie built here, would be important as the incidences grew more frequent and she became more aware.

The experience of identity discovery for Ciara was unique based on her upbringing in a white, "colorblind" community in San Diego, California. Race was never discussed or acknowledged; therefore, Ciara was ignorant of any racism – although it may have occurred. As

Ciara and her twin sister desperately wanted to fit in, the concept of Blackwomanhood was far from their consciousness. Instead, they chose to identify in groups just as their white peers – teenage girl, smart student, band geek, etc. Around her sophomore year of high school, Ciara began to recognize her Blackness and wanted to own it a bit more. Coupled with her continued desire to fit in, Ciara found "Blackwomanness" to be something that was hers to manipulate.

Ciara and her twin sister were two of five Black people in school, she described the others as "fringe." This allowed Ciara to play herself up as a token. Ciara's stereotypical jokes made her white peers laugh and placed her a peg above since they could not make these jokes themselves. Ciara felt it allowed students to relate to her more and increased their desire to talk to her. The jokes provided a shock value and attention that Ciara and her sister enjoyed. Being Blackwomen made them different in a cool way. Ciara looks back on this with shame, acknowledging that her pride in Blackwomanhood did not come until college.

When asked about spaces of influence, all our participants noted home life and their educational environment. Continuing with Ciara's narrative, she credited education with making her well-rounded and more openminded to lifelong learning. Within the classroom, Ciara was a star student that learned how to interact with her peers and teachers to the satisfaction of the school's standards. Higher achieving students were pulled out and rewarded with cool experiments and field trips while the other kids were left in the general classrooms. This foundation in successful socialization – ability to sit still, ask the right questions, respect the benefit in following rules – and her parents loving support kept Ciara focused on school. Amid her academic achievements, her family of low-economic status moved frequently until she turned twelve. The resilience of her family reflected in Ciara's work ethic.

In college, Ciara found the most valuable learning experiences were outside the classroom. She noted one of the most influential and positive spaces as the department of student involvement. Within this department, Ciara worked in their volunteering and student action sector where she gained pride in her identity and recognized the value of authentic diversity. Ciara grew to value Blackwomanhood past a token position and she was introduced to social justice. The office's mission and commitment to the wellbeing of all students also led to her current role as an advocate in a domestic violence shelter.

While Ciara had a "colorblind" upbringing in the presence of privileged, white society, Carrie experienced a very homogenous, Black, start to education in Atlanta. They were both unaware of difference but in Carrie's case this was due to the lack of difference from her home to school life. Her family guided her morals, values, ability to interact and relate to people, structured her thinking and function. This foundation was reinforced by her education because Carrie attended an all-Black school with people from the same backgrounds and her same neighborhood.

In Carrie's educational spaces, her knowledge was expanded, she was taught to challenge and defend beliefs, and academic excellence was valued. Although the school was void of much difference, looking back Carrie noted the subtle introductions to white society via the understanding of power dynamics, lessons in holding their tongues, and being advised not to shine as bright nor question their teachers. These lessons are common in Black households as well; in an effort to protect Black children from the unwarranted rage of white society, sadly we must be intelligent enough to understand the contexts where we advertise this and minimize it.

JM also grew up in predominantly Black spaces. From kindergarten to twelfth grade, JM was enriched by her family, church, school, and the Boys and Girls Club in Laurel, Mississippi. Beginning in kindergarten or first grade JM was labeled "gifted." This label made her a perfectionist, self-conscious of anything less. JM became accustomed to getting everything right and getting great grades. Her other gifted peers made comments like "well, of course you will get/win this, it's always you." JM's teachers would praise her achievements but often urged JM to give space to her peers by not raising her hand. High school Calculus humbled JM and her peers, however where her confidence was wounded it was renewed by her other spaces of influence.

JM's home was filled with exemplars of strength in a household driven by Blackwomen. The Boys and Girls Club taught JM to be more outspoken and confident; she found her voice and developed as a leader. In her church, JM assumed leadership roles that provided opportunities for her to speak up. JM exited this environment of Blackness to attend a PWI. JM's awareness of her Blackness grew as she was introduced to the feeling of difference in education. JM is typically one of three Black people in lectures. The intersection of race and education was amplified as she had to consider professionalism in terms of her hair and other natural features of her body – JM does not see her white classmates doing the same. Blackwomanhood was now something JM consciously considered because society did not consider it "normal."

Annie experienced a larger juxtaposition between her home and school life. Although she was not aware of it at the time, Annie's neighborhood in North St. Louis was an urban and segregated environment. Annie commented that most people identify themselves with their

state, sometimes their city, but for St. Louis people represented their small zip code communities. Rich white people lived in a distinct community and were close – did not fraternize with others; similarly, poor Black people lived in a certain zip code and were close. The tight knit space of North St. Louis was her first connection to a place and gave her a sense of community.

In contrast, Annie's Christian elementary school was fairly diverse – she was never the only Black student in a classroom, but the space was heterogeneous. The focus on Bible learning and character development was at an equal, if not greater, importance as the core curriculum; this presented religion as something one could study – Annie would go on to study some religion during her undergraduate career. The school lacked resources for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education, so the core curriculum was largely based in reading, speaking, and writing. Annie credits this foundation in words and language for reading more than the average person and the ease with which she stands on stages to give talks or speeches.

Annie enjoyed her elementary school experience. She was able to carpool with friends and the principals knew everyone's names. The Christian elementary school gave her a sense of self, her first report cards, trophies, certificates, etc. It was cool to be smart and Annie excelled in academics as well as field day. However, this pure joy in education was not sustained into middle and high school.

As previously established, Annie's first conscious experience with racism occurred in the seventh grade. The dissonance between her identity and her school environment increased as Annie entered a predominantly white, wealthy high school. In this space, Annie learned to

straddle two worlds. Annie's high school exposed the stark differences between *their* world and hers in North St. Louis; an all-Black "hood," by the railroad tracks, check to check living in multigenerational homes. This change in scenery presented her Blackness as something less desirable.

The Black male athletes were invited to the parties, while Annie was star on the women's basketball team and received no invites. Annie no longer fit in at home because of her private school education, yet her home life and background did not allow her to fit in at the private school. Her awareness of these circumstances in the ninth grade sparked her Blackwoman network. Out of a graduating class of one-hundred and twenty-eight students, they had eleven Black students (their largest number at the time). Eight or nine of these Black students were female. Annie is still close to five of those young Blackwomen; they travel together, talk daily, and serve as Godmothers to each other's children.

Emma was not able to find her Blackgirl network because she was the only Blackgirl or person in her kindergarten through twelfth grade classrooms. This was not because the New York schools were void of Black students, their labels segregated them from her and their non-Black classmates. Emma's school was divided into the STEM academy and the Star academy. STEM academy was designated for gifted and talented students – predominantly white "grandchildren of the senator" – predicted to attain four-year degrees or higher. Star academy students – majority Black and of low-socioeconomic status– were provided the trajectory of trade schools and technical colleges. Being in the STEM academy, Emma was exposed to the inequity of the education system and the desire to rectify it.

The split removed Emma from her neighborhood friends and created significant rifts in their relationships. When Emma tried to keep relationships with her Black peers in the lunchroom or at recess, they would often accuse Emma of thinking she was better than them. Emma's friends resented her for the privileges she attained in the STEM academy, and within this elite space Emma felt like an outsider. Every example used in her classrooms spoke to the experiences and perspectives of the wealthy white students; this gave Emma the awareness that the environment had not been created for her; she was not expected nor valued in the space. While Emma's parents emphasized that she should not be treated poorly for her difference in identity and experience, the treatment continued and shaped Emma's choice in post-secondary education. When deciding on a list of eighteen colleges – majority being PWIs – Emma ultimately chose a HBCU because she no longer wanted to be a minority in her educational spaces.

Alicia also felt a juxtaposition between her home on Southside Chicago and the suburbs. Existing between these spaces, her awareness of social structures grew exponentially. The first lesson was in white privilege and institutional oppression. The school system set out to retain Alicia in remedial classes. Although Alicia outperformed the general and accelerated students, her mother was forced to fight tooth and nail to place Alicia in the accelerated program. This made her question why the school could not simply acknowledge her achievement and place Alicia accordingly. Additionally, Alicia noticed she was tasked with being extra thoughtful in situations where her white friends could act carelessly. Alicia felt cheated from a better education and cheated from due praise for achievements because of her Blackness.

During Alicia's experience in the white, suburban school, she learned racism and prejudice are not limited to adults; these issues exist for children as well. Alicia saw that ignorance is not just for kids, it is a problem for adults too. She realized that oppression does not discriminate by age. Her teachers were comfortable saying the "n word" and they chose to ignore her achievements instead of welcoming them. In response to this external perception of herself, Alicia sought to fit in; she began straightening her hair in the fourth grade and she tried dressing like her white peers. Subsequently her peers scolded Alicia for not fitting their ideas and expectations of Blackness; she talked too much like them, dressed too much like them, so she was no longer Black *enough.* Moving back onto the Southside with her father during middle school, Alicia received the same criticisms from the Black students. They, too, referenced her clothes, talk, and mannerisms as being too white.

In the span of elementary to middle school, Alicia had gone from being too Black for her white peers, to not Black enough; this is feedback Alicia has continuously received. She still does not fit in with her family on the Southside. They often called her "white girl," and since attending college they refer to her as "college." Nevertheless, Alicia maintains a distinctive need to do and be what feels most like *her.* She is no longer fazed by the myriad of attacks on her hodgepodge of Blackness. Even as white and Black people – alike – do not perceive Alicia as Black enough, her pride in this identity still creates dissonance that makes white people feel uncomfortable.

Love Yourself, Respect Your Worth

My interviews produced two direct mentions of the adage, "you gotta work twice as hard to be half as good." The concept has been indirectly outlined in the previous section; I

wanted to take the time here to more intentionally discuss the basis for a majority of pressures placed on Blackwomen. I have heard it all my life – in addition to, "there's nothing they [the white students] can do that you can't, if they can do [insert any new subject that intimidated me at the onset] you can too!" The intention is to encourage Blackgirls, inspire us to be our best and brightest selves despite the stereotypes. The result can bring success but at insurmountable costs to mental, emotional, and maybe even physical health.

Annie recalls the adage and noted that it was exhausting but she had done it. She has been a Blackwoman executive in the corporate environment over the past eight to ten years. Annie noted this as a defining point that erased "the dream." Her generation was the first to feel "racism is dead," and here she is achieving greater things at higher levels. In the corporate world, Annie soon realized it was *still* not enough to be considered for the same opportunities as her more privileged colleagues – white men. At first, the realization was hurtful. Women of color are being denied opportunities, their skills and abilities are being denied. Occupying this environment removed the veil; Annie matured. Half as good is no longer acceptable for Annie, she determines where she works and what she accepts in these spaces. She has learned to play the game in order to achieve and maintain health.

Emma mentioned the adage as she discussed competition in the classroom that began in middle school. She was groomed by the concept "work twice as hard to get half as much" to the point of self-deprecation. The first example Emma provided was the ranking system of her high school. She was obsessed with making the top twenty for her class; it was all she could think about her senior year. Right before graduation Emma was at twenty-third in her class; the cut off for the top twenty was position twenty-two. Not making the list devasted her; Emma

was scrambling to earn that extra point. It did not help that out of about five Blackgirls, two had successfully made the top twenty. The competition of the educational environment was everything. Not being named one of the best, Emma felt she was not even good. It is the same reason earning a C in a class feels like the end of the world. As a Blackwoman, if you are only at a C, you may as well have earned an F. If peers are earning higher marks, you are not even half as good.

How to Find Your Passion?

Despite the pressure to settle

There is an insurmountable pressure placed on Blackwomen to succeed within the structures of white society. Even when we are encouraged to be whoever we dream to be, the pressure to build generational wealth and attain a position of prestige persists. As a child, the first dream job I can remember is a tattoo-artist; I loved drawing and painting so being a tattoo-artist seemed like the most stable financial option. A greater passion for teaching and mentorship were consistently present, but I pushed them aside for careers like pharmacy, forensic anthropology, physical therapy, and public health. While I still enjoy topics in human anatomy and physiology – and excelled in these subjects – my underlining passion for teaching continued to resurface and is something I have finally decided to pursue. Everything has aligned for me to pursue this dream. A commonality with our participants is the indirect pathway to their careers or intended careers.

Carrie's childhood dream was to become a singer. Her sister, older by eight years, sung in the chorus, her mother worked part time in the music industry, and Carrie loved to sing so it seemed like the obvious choice. Every career day she dressed as a singer – this entailed wearing

her sister's chorus dress. During her childhood, Carrie's grandmother introduced her to a book about Egyptology with which she quickly became obsessed. In high school, her ninth-grade teacher praised her skills in argument and debate; this gave Carrie aspirations of law school. Since then, her passions have complimented one another. In college, Carrie studied Egyptology along with political science and international relations. Carrie found Egyptology was not something she could do long term, so she went on to law school. Although not professionally, Carrie still sings in a semi-pro acapella group around town while she manages international relations for her alma mater. Carrie was able to accomplish all her childhood dreams in some fashion.

As a child, Alicia's dream career began in music; she wanted to be a music producer and to play twenty-seven instruments. Her parents said she could be anything, so Alicia set her dreams high. Reaching adolescence, Alicia's dreams began to shift away from music and toward science. In our conversation Alicia was reminded of her goal to write a book as well – something she is currently doing. Music and writing were put on the backburner because Alicia felt she could make more of an impact in environmental science and policy. Alicia was exposed to statistics regarding rates of death by starvation and the contradictory surplus of food and resources on the planet; this global dilemma has inspired Alicia to be part of the solution. This goal is complimented by her dream to fix the education system as senator of Illinois.

JM found her passions from interactions and relationships with her friends. Her first dream was to be a photographer which was influenced by her artsy friends. Early in middle school, JM dreamed of being a marriage counselor or therapist because she enjoyed talking to her friends about dating relationships. Her decision to pursue a career in education was

ultimately influenced by her friends again as she became passionate about helping with homework and explaining tough concepts to them.

In contrast, Ciara's dream of teaching was stifled by her peers because Ciara realized she would not want to teach *them*. The options to follow were STEM fields. Ciara desperately wanted to be perceived as a smart kid. To maintain this image, Ciara felt she needed to pursue a "smart" career. For her, doing things that did not show her intelligence diminished her worth. An apprenticeship steered her away from engineering and lab work, since then her desire to be a medical professional working with people has not changed much. Ciara still struggles with her self-image as she currently works in an advocacy center for survivors of domestic violence. When explaining her job to other people, Ciara expects them to react shadily; this comes from her internal fears of not appearing smart. Even as she works one on one with the survivors, assisting them in getting back on their feet, Ciara doubts her self-worth. In these moments, she reminds herself that she cannot predict the reactions or judgements of others; moreover, it should not matter what they think if Ciara finds her work fulfilling.

Emma's career goals immerged from her love of law television shows. Her desire to become a lawyer remained consistent until she met two teacher mentors in high school. The first teacher did not want to be a teacher, although they wanted to work in education. This teacher urged Emma not to conform to the desires of others but to pursue her passion. Then, when the other teacher – who really loved being a teacher and was inspiring in his pedagogy – pushed her to apply for an internship in education, the pieces aligned. Teaching was always a passion for Emma, though she was pushed toward more lucrative fields such as law or economics. This internship enabled Emma to teach in a low-income area. There Emma realized

she could not see herself doing anything else. Emma feels like she is entering a space where she can really make change happen.

Annie's first dream job was to be a librarian; she loved books and thought the librarian's stamp was cool – although the barcode scanner was even cooler. Her mother redirected Annie from this aspiration. Annie noted the expectation for the smart Black kids to become doctors, lawyers, or teachers. Those were the only options. Becoming a doctor was Annie's dream from adolescence until her junior year of undergraduate education. Saying she was pre-med incited reactions of admiration and amazement. After having completed most of her medical school prerequisites, Annie was studying for the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) and reached a full burnout. As a junior, Annie realized she had not been able to *really* experience college. Annie took too many science courses with labs in addition to working and balancing the women's basketball team commitments. She missed out on the typical first year experiences and had traded that for an uninterrupted grind. With these realizations, Annie no longer wanted to go to medical school and had no idea what she could do instead.

Annie's parents and academic counselors believed her when she said she was going to medical school, so no one talked to her about alternative options. Her academic counselors, specifically, lacked any passion for helping students. It was scary being twenty-one and not knowing what was next. Luckily, Annie met with a Blackwoman one year ahead of her who was pursuing a Master of Arts (M.A.) in healthcare administration. This introduction stuck with Annie so much, she went on to attend the same MA program as her peer mentor. Without this guidance, Annie may have suffered the same fate as her friends.

Annie's friends succumbed to the immense pressure and settled for the narrow definition of success expected of minority students. Her husband is an attorney, does *not* practice law, yet it is the first thing people say about him; medicine and law are *the* professions that garner the most pride in the Black community. Is the cost worth our happiness and fulfillment? Her friends, for example, are miserable in their law practice; they are ready to retire and find their "passion career." Why is this not acceptable on the first go-round? Annie was fortunate enough to find her passion career at the onset of her adult life. The joys of this achievement cannot be acknowledged without also expressing the struggles of tackling too many responsibilities at once; I asked all our participants to name an instance.

Seeking to answer my own question, I can name several instances of tackling too many responsibilities at once. I find no instance more fitting than right now, as I am writing this senior honors thesis. Most of our participants shared in my sentiments. Extreme multitasking was not a foreign concept, it was simpler to list the most recent – or even ongoing – instance as their response. Staying with Annie's narrative, she describes a recent eighteen-month long period.

After leaving her two-year MA program, Annie completed a two-year administrative fellowship, worked in strategic planning and consulting before becoming the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a rural hospital, at age thirty-three. The responsibilities she acquired in this position were typical expectations for any company president. When Annie arrived, the moral of the organization was very low, and the financial performance was very poor. Annie was tasked with improving moral, taking the hospital through Chapter Eleven bankruptcy while managing the other responsibilities of a hospital CEO. Bankruptcy required a federal court filing that kept Annie in court for depositions and hearings more than she was able to be in the

hospital. Balancing court appearances and day-to-day operations of the hospital was further complicated by council meetings at city hall, and board meetings for the local YMCA, United Way, etc. Outside her professional life and the health of community members, there were also multiple stakeholders.

Annie had responsibilities to her aging parents, responsibilities to her relationships – she was dating her, now, husband at the time and keeping touch with her friends. In the moment, Annie was in "the groove." Working nonstop, she did not slow down enough to consciously think about these responsibilities; she was just doing. It seemed like Annie was handling everything. In hindsight, Annie was in a high stress, high anxiety environment that brought her close to burnout. Annie was giving too much of herself without replenishment. Much of this was due to her lack of preparation for these responsibilities.

Annie was young, new to the type of position, new to the town, and without any meaningful connections. While resources would have provided an easier transition, coming from tough situations and being accustomed to working twice as hard to be half as good fueled her drive. Annie did not have time nor the experience of training and progressive leadership to formally prepare. The responsibilities did not particularly lighten up after the eighteen months of bankruptcy; however, Annie has since learned how to find balance.

JM, Alicia, and Ciara referenced their academic endeavors as creating an overwhelming amount of responsibilities to tackle. First, JM is currently in her last semester of undergraduate education. Pursuing a degree in elementary education has brought on many responsibilities. Currently, she is taking a full-time load of courses, student teaching the first grade, working part-time, and maintaining her involvement in student organizations. JM sometimes feels like

"it is what it is," and she must push to "make it do what it do." After all, these are things she wants to do – or feels that she must do. As the oldest of three siblings, JM felt prepared to take charge of her stressors and reassure herself that everything will get done. JM is accustomed to being in school, working after school, and balancing leadership – in the Boys and Girls Club and her church.

Alicia referenced the mirrored struggles she is facing in the last year of her master's program – just as she experienced in her last year of undergraduate education and high school. Alicia has found the transition period between levels of education to be uniquely overwhelming. In high school, she had the added pressure of starting the first-generation of college graduates. Her older sister had to drop out because their family could not afford the costs. Alicia was given no other option but to find a full ride. Each transition since then has brought the same feelings. Alicia credits overcoming these roadblocks by her spirituality and faith in Jesus. Even though she is not very emotionally close with her family, they also serve a support system. Her spirituality gives something to lean on that is way bigger than herself.

Ciara reflected on her last semester of undergraduate education as well as the roles she is currently balancing at the center. In this semester, Ciara struggled to manage twenty-one credits, a myriad of extracurriculars, and working. Ciara is not sure how she survived the experience with her sanity. At the domestic violence shelter, Ciara has taken on an extra load while her coworker is off. Scheduling for both positions has been hectic and overwhelming. Although Ciara feels prepared and supported by her job, keeping track of the needs for double the people has been difficult to manage. In both instances of tackling too many responsibilities, Ciara relies on community support. She finds strength and drive in having people to talk to that

do not judge her for needing the emotional support. These are people that encourage Ciara and people she can be tired around. Without a supportive community she may not have managed her last semester or her current workload.

While Emma is in her last semester of undergraduate education, she noted her second summer teaching in a low-income area. To begin, there were only three Blackwomen at the internship. Emma still looked forward to returning because she enjoyed her first experience. Being a "returner," Emma was held to a higher standard. In addition to teaching her subject matter, Emma taught 3 other subject classes, an elective, and homeroom. Outside teaching obligations, she also chaired the school-wide meeting, chaired the "culture committee," as well as the work of a colleague granted a position she was denied. Therefore, this incident not only offered the struggles of multi-tasking but also revealed discrimination of Black educators. In fact, Emma credits this experience with solidifying her decision to join in the fight to create a better education system.

A position opened that summer for which Emma applied. Emma could have brushed off or ignored them offering the position to a colleague if they had not subsequently poured his new responsibilities onto her already full plate. At this point, Emma was quite certain she was more qualified for the position. Being asked to do his work without the title illuminated a trend in her life. Emma was up for the position of group commander in high school Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC). The position was given to a white guy as Emma proceeded to do *his* work. The position at her internship was a sour reminder. Seeing the trend, Emma decided to handle this instance completely different than her complacency in high school. She would still

avoid the stereotypes surrounding Blackwomen, however she would not sit in her frustration silently.

Emma was very angry for the duration of the summer. At first, she was fixated on repressing it for the sake of rising above the stereotypes. “You don’t want to be angry, you don’t want to be mad, you don’t want to be mean, so what do I do?” Reflecting on these questions, Emma started by evaluated the program itself. The internship served a moderate group of kids, with the advertised goal of placing students in classrooms with teachers that look like them. Emma looked around and began to question why the *vast* majority of teachers were white with only one white student in the program. The more Emma questioned, the less and less the program became a fan of her. The program leadership sought to use Emma; she was Black, and a woman, so all the Black students became *her* problem.

By the end of the program, Emma was nitpicking everything; for example, a Black boy was in a fight today, leadership sends him home. A white boy does the same and they will not even call his mom. Emma questioning their decision-making, she became even more of a problem. When the participants were asked to make presentations at the close of the program, Emma called hers “Diary of a Black woman.” Her presentation, in particular, bothered them so much so that the next day leadership announced, “if we are just going to use these presentations to hurt other people’s feelings, we just won’t do them.” Emma responded by asking why expressing her experience as a Blackwoman in the space hurt their feelings. This was the end of her relationship with their organization, but the beginning of Emma’s work toward equity.

For Carrie, her bout with tackling a surplus of responsibilities has lasted for two-and-a half years and counting. In her career of international relations for her PWI, Carrie manages international partnerships, establishes and responds to university priorities, handles agreements, welcomes international visitors to the campus, and creates strategic programmatic goals. This is a full-time position; additionally, Carrie is teaching three test prep courses outside the university, working a part-time job on the weekends, and helping her family – Carrie just finished serving as caregiver for a partner who had cancer. It is stressful, exhausting, but something that "must be done," so she just does it. Carrie did not, and still does not, feel prepared for these responsibilities at all.

My next set of questions survey the women about how they practice self-care to recuperate from their struggles in trying to "do it all." My main form of self-care, now, is probably sleep, Bible reading, destress cleaning, dragging myself to sessions with my trainer, and listening to music, podcasts, or predictable movies and television. In the past I could list a number of hobbies that broke up the monotony and rejuvenated me for the pressures of daily life. I read for fun, painted, drew, played piano, played organ, played flute, journaled, wrote poetry, and maybe a few other things that are escaping my memory. I am currently working to reactivate more creative self-care practices. Following up with Carrie, she quickly admitted that she does not make time for self-care. The most she sees is an occasional break, once a year. That is as good as it gets for Carrie right now.

During her internship, Emma could not think of anything she considered "self-care" – you could better compare her actions over the summer to self-preservation. When Emma tried taking steps back and initiating conversations about her feelings they were ignored. With

minimal space to care for herself, Emma was left with surmounting anger. Emma has created more provisions since leaving the program and starting her final year of undergraduate education.

Now Emma prioritizes her boundaries. She does not answer phone calls after 10 PM and schedules self-care days. Establishing these priorities prevents Emma from overextending herself. On self-care days, Emma does not do anything but clean her room or sort clothes. In this time alone, she gets a break from the constant social settings. The tasks she completes on these days are calming and provide some grounding. The space to sit by herself, still in the moment, re-energizes Emma for the tasks of her next full day.

Alicia was once in the habit of penciling in self-care, now she can take the time wherever or whenever feels fitting. Somedays Alicia will walk home to get some sun instead of riding the train. If she feels overwhelmed during class, Alicia will remove herself from the space. She may walk around the building or go outside to reset for getting through the rest of class time. The night before our interview she had been on minimal sleep; nevertheless, Alicia spent the time to detangle her hair at 3 AM. Other forms of her self-care practice include listening to gospel rap. Alicia assured me that it “goes hard.”

JM’s most salient forms of self-care address her social and academic pursuits. JM socializes to break up her hefty schedule of work. Sometimes it is enough for her to create this break by watching movies, “Netflix and chilling,” and participating in other activities she likes. For her academic life, JM gives herself deadlines and checkpoints so that she can spread the work. Starting in advance and chipping away at her tasks provides JM with more time to do a little self-care each day.

Ciara also plans for self-care. She does not identify as spontaneous, so if it has not been scheduled it does not happen. In contrast to some of our listed self-care practices, Ciara is not able to properly reset from watching television or sleeping. The next day Ciara does not feel rested – for this reason she avoids leaning on these sorts of low-energy activities. When she is successfully managing her time and taking care of herself, Ciara prioritizes quality sleep at night, modifies her workday, and adds intentional practices after work. In the office, Ciara takes self-care breaks, drinks lots of water, and walks during her lunch. Ciara does not like sitting in the office during her breaks; walks help clear her head and frees her mind from whatever is overwhelming her at the time. She has recently added swimming in the evenings to routine of self-care. When swimming, Ciara is just swimming and nothing else worries her. Working out nervous energy through her practices excites Ciara about returning to her job the next morning – when these are not enough, she repeats affirmations. There are times so overwhelming that she struggles to do intentional self-care; to minimize these instances Ciara works to be proactive.

Annie has developed her self-care routine largely in response to the tendencies of her male colleagues. As a reminder, Annie was overwhelmed with the foreign responsibilities of a company CEO on top of bankruptcy and commitments to family, friends, and her romantic relationship. When Annie first started her time away in October, she slept well over eleven or twelve hours a day. Before this break, Annie did not realize she was tired. Annie found it interesting how Blackwomen sacrifice themselves for the greater good and do not even realize we are doing it at the moment; the men in Annie's field do not over-extend themselves.

The men Annie knows can be in the roughest, hardest part of the day, and they will go out for lunch, catch a happy hour, and are usually going golfing on Friday when the weather is nice. Comparing herself to them, she could not understand how they were balancing their workload so well; Annie felt that she had too much work. Then she realized they handle it differently; men considered networking as a part of their job. The men do not prioritize the work over themselves. This philosophy has shaped what Annie has been doing going forward.

As women, we kill ourselves for our jobs and to make a difference, but we are not getting ahead more nor are we happier. Annie thinks this is something deeply ingrained in us. Now that she is pregnant, Annie is working diligently to break this generational hold. At six months pregnant, she is no longer going into work every day. While there was a time Annie felt she could not live without it, Annie no longer drinks caffeine. Since prioritizing a good night's rest, Annie has enough rest at night as to not need the boost or jolt of something during the day.

Formerly, when days were busy at work Annie skipped meals. If she had a full calendar and someone said they desperately needed to meet with her, Annie would give them her lunch hour. With another life depending on her, Annie's opportunity to eat during the day is a nonnegotiable. Annie eats breakfast, lunch, dinner, in addition to power snacks (i.e., carrots, almonds, and other snacks without a lot of sugar and carbs to cause crashes). Moreover, Annie put a limit on the number of meetings she takes in a day. On an average day, Annie would have meetings from 7 AM until 6 PM or 7 PM. That reduced Annie's days to sitting, snacking or not eating at all. Annie limits the number of meetings she will attend in a day; she stretches her legs

doing rounds around the hospital, she elects to stand at her desk during calls, etc. Eating and exercising make a real difference.

To maintain her practice in self-care, Annie no longer says yes to everything. She perceives saying no as a form of self-care, in itself, that should be guilt free. When saying yes is an option – Annie can move her schedule around to add more meetings without compromising her health – she asks her assistant to get her lunch. Asking people to do things for her was once a barrier to expanding her availability and efficiency. Asking assistants to "assist" is common of male-lead offices across the globe. Yet, as a woman, it felt like something outside Annie's role. Her energy level is much different now.

Sometimes our own ambitions and pride can be the very things that stifle our flourishment. Self-care must be nonnegotiable for healthy fulfillment and happiness. The following cycle of narratives presents responses to the questions of finding fulfilment and/or happiness in one's current pursuits. I think I have felt both, but I rarely feel them intensely synchronized. There are many days I struggle to recall a purpose in my work at all. At what cost does my productivity supersede my health, sanity, and happiness? Can frustration and fulfilment coexist? What magical bliss occurs when you are driven by the purpose and practice of your work?

As another college senior, JM shares in my sentiments of uninspired feelings of fulfilment and happiness and Emma finds that any instances surface from activities outside her academic pursuits. Emma attributes her lack of fulfilment in work to not selecting education as a major. Business may be something Emma is good at, but business is not her passion. Classes often feel as if she is just *there.*

Outside her academic work, Emma attains happiness from fulfilment. Being the founding president of an agribusiness club has enabled Emma to enter schools to talk to students about the possibilities of careers in agriculture, economics, and business. Through her membership in a historically Black sorority, Emma mentors. She works with students on the application process and deciding on what colleges to go to – keeping their options very open. Additionally, any service Emma can offer brings her happiness. In this way, any activity that enables Emma to get in a classroom and serve is fulfilling. Emma does not gain happiness from her actual course work at all, she ties whatever assignment she gets to education. Emma becomes more ostracized from her academic program as the business department frowns on anything outside the fortune five-hundred realm. For example, Emma had an internship listed in the top ten, with more merit, however people working internships right up the street received more of a spotlight because hers was based in education and there's was not.

Alicia also feels like an outsider within her program; it drives her to succeed. She is familiar with the feeling of being the only Black student in a space. Especially considering her goal to help one million people before she dies, Alicia is inspired to fight harder for the Black and Brown voices to enter these exclusive spaces. If Alicia does not make it to her 8 AM lecture, no one with a conscious stake will raise the voices of Black and Brown people. Being "one of one" is saddening but every class she takes, article she reads, lecture she participates in bring her one step closer to achieving her goal. Helping one million people before she dies also includes uplifting Black and Brown youth to see a passion and future in environmental sciences. If weather patterns are taken as signs, our planet will need them.

Helping people in combination with establishing connections are fulfilling for Ciara. In her advocacy work at the domestic violence shelter, Ciara can witness clients overcome so much. She has the privilege of seeing them build upward from hard places. To leverage her fulfillment to happiness, Ciara reminds herself to release control. Considering, "well if I was in this boat, I would do this" is not productive. People will make their own decisions as their definition of success differs. Ciara's job is not to control her clients' definition but help them get to *their* success. Similarly, Ciara cannot accept fault if outcomes fall short of expectations; she must offer space and guidance for her clients to assume the leg work.

Ciara tends to be very uptight and controlling. These characteristics also work against Ciara's happiness when clients may become upset or agitated and she carries the burden. Ciara is learning that people's reactions are not always directly correlated to their experience with you. "A lady yelling about what the organization was *not* able to do for her and their unwillingness to offer referrals" is doing just that. She is releasing her frustrations and fears, Ciara is in audience of this process by happenstance. Honing her skills in the workplace have also translated to Ciara's personal life. Ciara lets in more happiness when she works to reverse years of self-image insecurity.

Carrie does not practice self-care. Her negligence in that regard limits the capacity for fulfillment and happiness but Carrie, nevertheless, loves her career. Despite the feeling of being overwhelmed, international work enables Carrie to travel, meet new people, and collaborate with diverse organizations globally. Her creativity is channeled as she produces innovate ideas for an institution she cares about – Carrie works at her alma mater for undergraduate and graduate studies. Creating new life changing experiences and seeing the impact of these ideas

on faculty and students provides the merit in her work. The additional opportunities for Carrie to be a lifelong learner combined with her ability to stay close to home bring Carrie happiness, in the absence of healthy flourishment.

Annie acknowledges the blessing of finding the perfect career for her personality. She does not take her life for granted. Annie has many friends in the same space between quarter- and midlife feeling unfulfilled and ready to switch careers. These friends are not happy; Annie does not share in their experience. They suffer from daily minutia comparable to parts of an assembly line. Annie loves working in leadership. She enjoys leading people, teams, and setting strategy. The opportunities she creates for solving problems lies in an industry set on improving community health – a bonus to her career among many others.

Annie's position serves as inspiration for new generations of Blackwomen to rise. Growing up in North St. Louis exposed clear distinctions between the haves and the have-nots. At 8 AM Annie saw the haves at school, on sports teams, and other extracurriculars then ended her day in her neighborhood of have-nots. Annie is subsequently driven to create an economic legacy for her family and leverage her position as a strong advocate in the haves to uplift the other have-nots. Annie and her family do not worry about the daily security of managing student loans or mortgage. Although Annie is far from wealthy, she understands this is not the case for most Americans.

Annie is a visible Blackwoman executive. Following a keynote speech, a little Blackgirl (eight or nine-years-old) came up and remarked, "I like your hair." This was the code the Blackgirl used to say," I wear my hair natural and *you* wear your hair natural, I see the possibility for me to be at the podium." Being that person for little Blackgirls and putting her

beliefs and values to practice are heartily fulfilling for Annie. She believes in using your voice for people who have been historically voiceless; she believes in giving time and talent to those who are underprivileged. She believes in standing up for what is right. Annie would take time to uphold her values and beliefs regardless, she is happy to have a job offer the *platform* and *opportunity* for her to do them.

Education has an influential hand in our lives. Before asking my closing questions I requested one more evaluation of their educational experience, in retrospect of everything else they had said. JM pointed to the examples of effective teachers and curriculum she had from her all-Black schools, seventh to twelfth grade especially. After entering college JM saw the higher standards of her schools in comparison the other counties. She had received better than average schooling; JM will soon be able to offer the same, and better, to her elementary students.

Carrie shares in fond memories of an educational experience that enriched Black youth. She did not notice at the time, but in retrospect Carrie's schools were lacking in resources during elementary through middle school. However, the bubbles of Black excellence and Black self-sufficiency provided a firm foundation. Carrie had outstanding teachers; her teachers cared for and about their students. There were fun things to do like the teacher's pet snake and Carrie's grandmother playing Mrs. Claus around Christmas time. Carrie grew in a warm environment.

Discrepancies emerged when Carrie started high school and grew more apparent in college as she worked with high schoolers. Carrie's high school could afford to send students to debate competitions out of state, the larger funding created broad-ranging access – to

resources and, often, better teachers. Community outreach as a college student further increased her awareness.

Ciara was largely unaware of the problems in her "colorblind" San Diego education until she left. Notwithstanding, Ciara understands nothing to be perfect. Her family lived in Texas until was nine years old. In Texas, she was among a diverse peer group; Ciara lost classrooms of white *and* Black students to "all-white schools." By the scale of a good, Western education, Ciara's learning environment was better in California. For her connection to Blackness, Ciara missed the opportunity to have Blackgirl peers with whom to flourish and grow. Without this influence, she learned the definition of pretty based on the perspective of white peers. It has taken Ciara a long time to unlearn this societal image – white, Blond-hair, blue-eyed girls, size 1 or 2, under five feet, six inches. Retrospectively, Ciara wished she had diverse cohorts; she believes this would have established solid foundation for a different, more positive self-image.

In retrospect, Emma received inequitable treatment in spaces that were not engineered for *her* to occupy. Her experiences of racism, especially the repeated instances in fourth and twelfth grade, inform Emma's comportment in collegiate classrooms and how she views academic competition. In fourth and twelfth grades, Emma felt helpless in her capacity to defend herself and her identity – remember she was the only Black or female person during the incident. She feared being labeled the aggressor if she had remained in the space and engaged the white male student. This scenario played out during her internship – recall that Emma continued expressing her feelings of discomfort and concern with the program's approach to people of color and each time, leadership became more and more dissatisfied with her – but Emma had reached a self-assurance and maturity level that removed her previous fears of

epitomizing the stereotypes. Diminishing herself for the comfort of white people fuels the perpetuation of oppression and unearned privilege.

Alicia's identity was questioned while in the suburbs and on the Southside of Chicago. Regardless, she reflected on her experience in education with gratitude. Often times, it was taxing but Alicia would not be who she is now otherwise. Ostracization from both white and Black peers prepared her to be in a field where no one else looks like her. Accustomed the being the "only one," Alicia has the courage to speak up for the historically voiceless often absent from the space. Alicia did not have the vocabulary to articulate herself with confidence as a child; today she does not let these opportunities pass.

Annie looks back on her experience in education and she is grateful for where is she today; however, Annie does plan to prioritize differently for her own children. She will not put them in the same spaces she was put in. Her father went to all "colored" schools while her mother, who was mixed, could pass and attend all white schools. Annie's parents prioritized placing their children in the richest, most privileged schools in town – taking out the loans to do so. Annie is determined to protect her child's self-worth, giving him a sense of identity. Placing her Black son in spaces of all-white students, taught by all-white, most often female, teachers does not sound like a healthy place to put a young Black male.

Annie remembers her undergraduate experience and wishes she had prioritized experience and learned more about being "present." Annie missed out on the opportunities to sit down and chill in a stress-free moment. The absence of those experiences largely limited her capacity to build closer ties – Annie has more friends from high school she talks to than college. College was her last chance to simply be. Following graduation, jobs require you fit into the

company's culture. College has enough different kinds of people that you have less pressure to conform and more freedom to find yourself. Annie's diligent habit of "always doing and always achieving" was a hinderance in this case, but the mindset enabled her to quickly scale the ladder of hospital leadership. It is possible she could have grown in both areas to reach the same top position she finds herself in today; Annie's goal is to prioritize this holistic growth for the next generation.

All our participants, myself included, are mentally – and quite literally – decades away from retirement. I chose to conclude the formal interview with the question of retirement, if or when, because I had inclinations that this will look quite different for millennials. Carrie confirmed my suspicions. Her first statement in response was "I am a millennial." Carrie went on to define this label as the belief we work till we die. In her opinion, millennials are saddled with student loan debt, stagnant wages, and rising prices. She doubts our ability to create enough wealth to comfortably retire without doing any subsequent work for pay. Carrie is still planning for it by contributing to her 401K but is very prepared to simply retire from this primary job to continue in some other form. She believes this new form of retirement is far removed from past generations retiring, running off to buy a home in Florida, playing card games and reading all day. Although not as explicitly said, Annie agreed on the shift.

Annie is "planning" to retire slightly later than she originally thought. The tradeoff for always being about achievement and, therefore, being in spaces which prioritized achievement is pushing back goals of marriage or children – Annie believes this to be more common in Blackwomen than any other group. The higher up we climb, the more delayed these goals become.

Annie is having her first child at age thirty-eight. Her child, assuming he graduates at age twenty-two, will graduate when Annie will be sixty years old. Annie and her husband plan on having more children which will have them paying college tuitions well past year sixty-five. The average retirement age is set for sixty-five; earlier in her life, Annie wanted to retire at age sixty. Now, she joins the ranks of other millennials pushing back the start of retirement.

Annie believes that there comes a point where you can no longer work on someone else's schedule. She is in anticipation of this time. Retirement for Annie looks like traveling the world, volunteering, doing some healthcare consulting, but she mainly plans to use her time for mentoring Blackwomen executives – a unique, very lonely space. Annie does not want to practice her beliefs solely for the *money*; once reaching retirement, she wants will live out her beliefs and values full time on her *own* time.

It may be the naivety of a decade less of experience, but our other participants *currently* plan to retire in more of the traditional sense. After working several years in East Africa on climate research, travel, public policy work, serving as Illinois senator, and locking her hair as a professor, Alicia plans to retire peacefully. Alicia gave options such as Kenya or Tanzania, but it is certain she will not be "state side." She will be "glo'ing, melanated, and hydrated" somewhere speaking Swahili – retired, happy, in the sun." Alicia anticipates going home, Chicago, only for holidays if at all.

By retirement, Ciara ideally wants to have had a family and be an empty nester with a "really fat" retirement account for traveling to new places. She aims to have a bomb life as an old person, living in a great community on the coast, able to afford visit to see her kids, and healthy enough to get around comfortably. Obesity and diabetes run in her family, so Ciara is

being careful to put in the work on the front end to maintain her freedom of mobility and health in the long run.

For JM, retirement is the point at which one does everything they always wanted to do but could not do because of time, money, and responsibilities. Before retirement JM perceives us as "doing what we *have* to do." She hopes to reach this leisure time by sixty-five or seventy years old. JM plans to do something low energy like writing a book or teaching a few college courses when she feels like it. She will also prioritize family time with her kids and grandkids.

We have reached the conclusion of the formal interview questions. To close each conversation, I requested closing thoughts or words of wisdom they would like me to include. Ciara offered the demand for teachers to be paid considerably higher wages, as they are cultivating our future. She also commented on the generational legacy of poverty flowing from public education determining quality based on neighborhood tax brackets. Alicia added to these sentiments expressing that academia is really tough; if you make it out of secondary school, the "next logical step" was created to exclude people with differences for selectivity. Alicia wishes she could tell her younger self this; she makes a point to tell other young kids. You do belong, and mentorship – if you can find it – is more than half the battle.

Carrie chose to reflect on her multiple touchpoints with education. First, she has realized how you can attend a well-resourced school but still lack access to all the resources required to conquer higher education seamlessly. Carrie is not entirely sure she was prepared to take on college. From an international perspective on education, Carrie has seen how much we require of students in the United States past scoring well. International education systems set their cutoffs with scoring; attaining the satisfactory score provides access to their higher

education systems. America requires students to compete further, universities and colleges are looking for leaders, scholars, writers, volunteers, and anything one can add to their resume.

While the United States education system provides more in classroom feedback and interaction, we are taught *how* to do things. Other cultures focus on *why* we do things before introduction to the how. Regardless of location on the globe, socioeconomic status and other identity-markers serve as barriers to formal education. Carrie thinks the next steps for education to establish environments wherein students can explore, learn, and grow will require acknowledgement of such barriers – if nothing more. Most tend to focus on education as achievement and academic excellence rather than considering the barriers and the impacts of life outside the classroom on students' educational experience; our current practice creates trauma-inducing competition.

In her closing remarks, Annie credits the home for Blackwomen's achievement culture. She goes further to highlight the home as our site of formative education. Annie thought of her niece and nephew in this reflection. Her niece is only four years old, yet their family has distinct expectations for her behavior versus that of Annie's nephew. Her niece, as all Blackgirls, is expected to be sweet, loving, nurturing, caring, strong, independent, lady-like, and overall, well put together. Annie's nephew can run outside and get dirty all he wanted to, but we do not want the little Blackgirls to mess up their ponytails or their nice clean clothes – "hair better be right for picture day." Expectations for Blackgirls are set on being a symbol of perfection, strength and intelligence; it starts at home.

We, Blackwomen, go into every environment with generational pressure already on our shoulders. Our environments reward the achievement culture Annie describes. A never-ending

cycle forms in which “the more I can achieve, the better I am and the better I feel [about myself] and the better I am recognized.” Blackwomen’s counterparts – white women, white men, Black men, etc. – are being promoted, rewarded, and sought out for positions without killing themselves in the same way that we are. That has been the most eye-opening for Annie over the last decade; there is a game that is being played in corporate America and Blackwomen are losing it. She has started to play this game in the last few years of her career.

I sit here now a little perplexed as to how I can conclude a project I feel has only just begun. First, we established the historical precedents for the predicament in which we, Blackwomen, find ourselves. Then we reflected on the Euro-centric conception of self-actualization and brought it to match with the more tangible demands of the Black Panther Ten-Point Program. The first chapter pieced together the process of socialization for Blackwomen. Chapter two dove into the intricacies of American education system and revealed how it was designed to function inequitably. In chapter three we considered the largely futile attempts to rework the system. Expressed within the narratives of our participants, we see the formation of identity in perceived opposition to the "norm," internalization of stereotypes and spirit-murdering competition. Emma, entering education as a teacher, attested to overloading Black educators with the "burden" of non-white students.

Ciara disputed the long-proposed solution of color-blind communities and schooling as she has struggled to un-learn the subsequent negative self-imaging from her experiences. Carrie showed us how one can survive the day, pulling out the positives while neglecting her own health for the sake of others. Alicia exuded a pride in her Blackwomanhood that surpassed perpetually being the "only one" and attacks on her legitimacy from every direction – but God. JM offered a small-town perspective which displayed the merits of matriculating through a school within a community that values your personhood. From Annie's breakdown of the game that is corporate America, we can draw advice for better approaching life overall – no amount of work should overshadow your health and wellness. These were my major takeaways; you may have found other aspects more riveting – if any aspect of this project at all.

My next steps are to put my words to action. The research was disheartening, but the interviews were energizing. Following each conversation, I encountered feelings of comradery and common interest. I am currently considering a few future directions. The first is to more intentionally research how mental health services fit into the conversation of survivance. Another question I pose is whether eradication of generational trauma is even possible. Looking back on my project, I do not believe self-actualization can come with the barriers that generational trauma build. Lastly, I wonder how this project can be transformed into something more tangible for optimal impact. Right now, I cannot name any one place that needs to be altered for sustained improvement in the condition of Blackwomen. Each environment most likely brings its own set of needs. In my next projects I will continue gathering the narratives of Blackwomen in the hopes of identifying these tangible changes.

Interview Questions

- How are you doing today? How do you feel?
- When (year) were you born?
    - Where were you born?
- When did you begin self-identifying as a Black woman?
    - Who made you aware and why?
- What spaces have influenced you the most in life?
    - How have they influenced you?
- How has your experience in the education system informed your life?
    - Specifically, from elementary school, what lessons were learned?
    - How did you perform?
    - How was your performance perceived by peers?
        - the teacher?
- What did you want to be when you grew up as a child?
    - Adolescent?
    - Young adult?
    - Were these dreams/goals inspired by anyone in particular?
    - Have you accomplished these goals?
    - If there was change, what were the causes (internal or external - gender/race norms)? [similar for if not accomplished, causes + what they are doing now instead]
- What are you doing now? School? Career?

    - How do you think you are being fulfilled by this work?
    - How do you think you are gaining happiness in this work?
- In your career/life, can you name an instance in which you tackled many responsibilities at once?
    - How long did this/has this lasted?
    - How did you/do you feel about it?
    - What prepared you for these responsibilities?
    - What did you/do you do to care for yourself?
        - How did you/do you make time to care for yourself?
- How do you view your educational experience as a child, now that you are older?
- When do you plan to retire (if at all)? How do you plan to spend it and why this way?

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