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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, BWT CODES: A STUDY OF ACTIVIST BLACK WOMEN TEACHERS AND THEIR WELLNESS, by DANIE MARSHALL, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education & Human Development, Georgia State University.

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BWT Codes: A Study of Activist Black Women Teachers and Their Wellness

By: Danie Marshall

Under the Direction of Dr. Joyce E. King

Abstract

This Africana Womanist, oral history illuminates the lives of activist Black women teachers' wellness practices past and present, who have taught in the metro Atlanta, Georgia area for five years or more. The women share their stories on life and wellness while teaching in the public school system and navigating the pandemics of racism, sexism, white supremacy, and social unrest. Using oral history as a methodology, this work is theoretically positioned within the framework of womanism, which centers the experiences of everyday Black women and Africana Womanism, which is grounded in Afrocentricity and the experiences of African women. The major research question that guides this study is the following: 1) How do three self-identified activist Black women teachers resist the multiple forms of oppression and marginalization they face in the U.S. as they navigate their educational and professional journeys? Using oral history methods to conduct interviews and photovoice activities, I examine their perspectives on: (a) their experiences as activist Black women teachers, and (b) their wellness and practices they have used to remain in their profession. The overwhelming evidence from the interviews, artifacts, and photovoice activities suggests that activist Black women teachers often engaged in unpaid labor in the name of their students, schools, and community. This labor makes it difficult

for them to maintain their physical wellness practices, however, their spiritual wellness practices give them the strength to navigate and remain in the educational profession.

Major findings also indicated that activist Black Women Teacher's practiced three wellness activist codes, Respite, Artfulness, and Spirit, in the educational profession in order to resist the pandemics associated with teaching. BWT experiences' highlighted the need for policies which addresses teacher wellness in order to retain highly qualified and critical thinking change agents in the classroom.

INDEX WORDS: Black teachers, Teacher Retention, Wellness, Motherhood, Pandemics, Africanity, Oral History, Womanism

BWT Codes: A Study of Activist Black Women Teachers and Their Wellness

by

DANIE MARSHALL

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Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Social Foundations

in

Educational Policy Studies

in

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Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA

2023

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2023

DEDICATION

God. The Creator. The Almighty is so good.

I dedicate this dissertation to my benevolent ancestors and spirit guides. Those who have had my back and helped guard my Ori. Asé

I dedicate this dissertation to all the Black girls and Black boys who got lost in the struggle.

I dedicate this dissertation to those who wanted to do it but just didn't have *it* to give.

I dedicate this dissertation to my great-grandmothers: Eulalee Charrington, Linnie Bell Brown, Lena Little, and Ida Miller.

And to all the names I do not know, but we share the same blood, this is for you.

I dedicate this dissertation to Audre Lorde, Anna Julia Cooper, bell hooks, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ida B. Wells, Mary McLeod Bethune, Maya Angelou, Ntozake Shange, Octavia Butler, Toni Morrison, Zora Neal Hurston.

Your memory lives on, in me.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation,

To every colored girl

Who has considered suicide/

When the rainbow is enuf

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Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES vi

LIST OF FIGURES vii

1 THE ISSUE..... 1

A Day in the Life of a Black Woman Teacher 1

A Prelude..... 4

Devotion..... 5

Research Question..... 11

The Scripture: African Ways as a Foundation for Knowing..... 14

Prayers, The Gift that Keeps on Giving: Pandemics..... 15

Significance of Research 16

Operational Definitions..... 18

Organization of the Dissertation (The Welcome)..... 19

2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 21

From the Choir: What’s Race Got to Do with It? 21

Black Feminism: Sexism as a Pandemic 24

Race and Medical Pandemics..... 26

Tithes: Womanism and Wellness..... 30

Womanism (Africana)..... 32

Spirit and Womanist Theology 34

Mothernity 38

Moving in Womanish Ways 40

Offering: Activist Black Women and (Un)Wellness Historically 43

Oral History of Bazoline Usher..... 50

What Do BWT Stories Mean for Our Wellness 52

Selection From the Choir: Black Teachers and Research on Retention and Attrition 55

Chapter Two Summary 62

3 METHODOLOGY 64

Introduction to The Message..... 64

Study Purpose and Research Framework 65

Epistemology, Theoretical Perspectives, and Frames..... 66

Positionality..... 68

Oral History 71

<i>Memory</i>	73
Photovoice	76
Setting and Sample	79
Assumptions	86
Data Analysis	86
Limitations	91
Delimitations	91
Trustworthiness	92
Chapter Three Summary	92
4 RESULTS	93
Growing Up from the Black Bottoms: The Origin Stories of Three Black Women Teachers	94
<i>The Book of Ms. Deborah Davis</i>	95
<i>The Book of Ms. Tamara Ivy</i>	99
<i>The Book of SJ Educate</i>	104
Sometimes, You Have to Retreat to Be Well	109
<i>The Wellness Codes of Ms. Deborah Davis</i>	110
<i>Ms. Deborah Davis Photovoice Activity 1</i>	112
<i>The Wellness Codes of Ms. Tam Ivy</i>	112
<i>The Wellness Codes of SJ Educate</i>	113
Wellness Activism, A Fight for My Right to Live	114
<i>Tam Ivy</i>	114
<i>Tam Ivy Photovoice Activity 1</i>	116
<i>SJ Educate</i>	116
<i>SJ Educate Photovoice Activity 1</i>	119
<i>Ms. Deborah Davis</i>	120
On My Job: Motherhood and Black Women	121
<i>Ms. Deborah Davis</i>	121
<i>Ms. Deborah Davis Photovoice Activity 2</i>	124
<i>Ms. Tam Ivy</i>	124
<i>SJ Educate</i>	126
<i>SJ Educate Photovoice Activity 2</i>	128
That’s When the Spirit Shows Up: Black Women and Spirituality.	129

<i>Ms. Deborah Davis</i>	129
<i>Ms. Tam Ivy</i>	130
<i>Tam Ivy Photovoice Activity 2</i>	131
<i>SJ Educate</i>	132
<i>SJ Educate Photovoice Activity 3</i>	133
Black Women Teachers, I Just Want Y'all to Know the Codes	134
<i>Deborah Davis</i>	134
<i>Tam Ivy</i>	135
<i>SJ Educate</i>	136
5 IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS	137
Sermon	137
Identifying the BWT Codes	140
Code 1: Combat Pandemics (Stress) with Respite	143
What Does Respite Mean for Black Women Teachers' Wellness and Retention?	147
Code 2: Seek Wellness in the Arts	148
Code 3: Let the Spirit Use You!	152
Motherhood as an Extension of the Spirit	154
Wellness Activism	158
<i>Implications</i>	160
Altar Call: Wellness Activism	161
Policy Implications	163
Benediction: The Doors Are Open	166
REFERENCES	169
APPENDICES	187

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Biographical Information for Three Black Women Teachers.....	81
Table 2. Subcategories from Comparative Coding.....	88
Table 3. Main Categories from 3rd Round of Coding.....	89

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Purpose, Research Design, and Theoretical Frameworks 65

Figure 2. The Emergence of Themes..... 90

Figure 3. The Categories of the Narratives 94

Figure 4 Ms. Deborah Davis Photovoice Activity 1 112

Figure 5 Tam Ivy Photovoice Activity 1 116

Figure 6 SJ Educate Photovoice Activity 1..... 119

Figure 7 Ms. Deborah Davis Photovoice Activity 2 124

Figure 8. SJ Educate Photovoice Activity 2..... 128

Figure 9. Tam Ivy Photovoice Activity 2 131

Figure 10. SJ Educate Photovoice Activity 3..... 133

Figure 11. The BWT Codes of Wellness 143

Figure 12. 7 Phases for Teacher Wellness Activism in Homes, Communities, and Schools
..... 166

1 THE ISSUE

A Day in the Life of a Black Woman Teacher

It was an early November morning when I arrived to substitute for my fourth time this week at Oppressions Elementary School. The sun had yet to rise, but my spirit was up and encouraged to face the day with encouragement. I turned off my car and grabbed my bag from the seat next to me, when I noticed a sound, a familiar sound that took me back to my childhood and Sunday mornings in an old Baptist church. I opened the car door and to my surprise there were multiple teachers sitting in their cars. Mrs. J was parked next to me and could not hear my hello over the Mississippi Mass Choir blasting from her sound system. Her off-key singing tickled me as I started the trek to my school's front door. I passed by another teacher, still sitting in her car, playing the gospel group Radical for Christ's new hit song and in the car right next to her was Mr. Scott dancing to another gospel tune. The sound of his baritone voice attempting to hit the high notes of Fred Hammond's choir as they proclaimed, "When the Spirit of the Lord comes upon my heart, I will dance like David danced!" made me shake my head in awe, questioning: What is going on here? Why are these teachers playing gospel music at a volume that could surely deafen the average person at 7am?

As I got to the front door and finally entered the school, I was shocked to hear an alarm blaring throughout the hallways. I cupped my ears to try and block the sound when a student ran past me yelling, "Leave me alone," as the assistant principal followed yelling on his walkie-talkie: "Code orange. The student is trying to escape!" I paused in my tracks, wondering what in the world I had walked into? Why would a student want to "escape" when the school day has yet to commence? I moved quickly to my assigned room, Mrs. Gardner's third grade class, thankful that the alarm had finally stopped. I prepared the items I would need for instruction and brought

out the book we had been reading all week on American Hero Harriet Tubman and excitedly stood at the door as the kids begin to arrive. “Good morning!” I said to them, “Would you like a hug, handshake or a high five?” I had been their substitute teacher on several occasions this year, so many of them opted for hugs. Their permanent teacher was seven months pregnant and on bed rest after being pushed down at last week’s school board meeting where parents were protesting the teaching of critical race theory in their public schools.

After the morning announcements, the students came to the front of the room to sit on our class carpet with one of them animatedly asking, “Are we going to read more about General Tubman today?” I smiled and replied, “Of course!” as I opened the book and pulled out our place holder. I asked two students to recount what we had previously read in case someone was absent earlier in the week and missed part of the book. It was amazing to hear the zeal in their voices as they retold the story of Tubman and John Brown meeting in Canada before his raid on Harpers Ferry. Malik yells out, “Oh yeah! She just finished planning the Combahee River offensive for the Civil War!” I smile at Malk nodding my head in agreement, thumbing through the book’s pages, when the principal unlocks the door and calls me to the hallway. The kids look at me wide-eyed as I get up and approach him. His normally pale face was red and splotchy, and his thin lips were taut. He grimaced as he looked at me and said “What is this dribble that you are reading? We got a complaint from Karen’s mom that you are reading a book about John Brown. This is not in the curriculum for 3rd grade. Hand over the book now or leave. Don’t you know we have a law against divisive concepts in the state of Georgia? You’re lucky their real teacher is out having another brat again. They shouldn’t allow you women to teach anyway. You tell me why I shouldn’t have your teaching license revoked for this!” His screaming tirade had teachers sticking their heads out of their classroom doors and looking at us all down the hallway. I looked

at him as if he had grown two heads and laughed as his chest heaved up and down in anger. I walked away from him and back into the classroom and began to pick up my bag and personal items when one student suddenly yelled out. “Mama, I mean Mrs. Marshall, No!” I stopped in my tracks considering the impact that my leaving would have on the students. I put my things down and went to hug the student who was in distress. Her father was on the chain gang at a South Georgia prison and her mother was recently incarcerated in Fulton County Jail. Her grandmother had custody of her, and her four siblings and she was the oldest girl. I said to the student with kind eyes, “I’m not leaving Paris. Don’t worry.” I then walked back to the principal and shared that that the book was my personal property, and I would no longer read it to the students. He leaned in closely to me whispering angrily “Count yourself fortunate that no one else wants to sub at this school much less leave their cars all day in this crummy ghetto. Otherwise, I ‘d have your ass escorted off the premises.” The bell rings signifying that it is time to transition to the next subject. I smirk at him saying “Count yourself fortunate that I have class to teach. Otherwise, I would have my lawyer drawing up papers to sue your pasty ass.” I turned on my heels with a “Good day!” aimed at him and proceeded to transition the students to the next lesson.

The rest of the school day flew by and before I knew it, it was lunch time. I sat in the teachers’ lounge and listened as multiple members of the all-Black and mostly female teaching staff shared their problems. “This morning Chaos came in without his medicine. He ripped down every bulletin board in my classroom and hit one student with a chair. I sent him to the front office, and would you believe he came back with a coloring sheet and lollipop from the counselor? What am I doing in this job?” Another teacher replies, “You think you are having a bad day? I was observed by the principal in the middle of my science lesson! He asks why I only

have books by Black authors displayed on the top shelf of my library. When I replied that I rotated my books to feature books on Black, Brown, and Indigenous peoples, he said he would be coming in everyday to make sure I wasn't teaching students anything other than "American excellence in this school." I shook my head left to right in disgust as one Black woman teacher after another shared stories from their day before I asked the group, "Well, what are we going to do about it? Mrs. Gardner timed her pregnancy so that she could be here with her students for most of the school year and she's the president of our local Georgia Association of Educators chapter, which advocates and organizes on behalf of teachers. This isn't right." One of the first-year teachers replied, "I'm just gonna stay late every day and study the standards on the weekend. I need this job. I have so many student loans!" Several other teachers began to nod their heads in assent, before Mrs. Kujichagulia, an 18-year veteran of the school said, "Keeping your head down won't do anything to stop this machine. If we want to see some real change for ourselves and our students, we must organize. We cannot continue to work under these conditions of silence, surveillance, and fear. Our student population is ninety-nine percent African American and most of us live and work in this urban Black community or somewhere similar. How dare we fail to teach our students about their history and beauty. We cannot stand by and watch this any longer. We must organize!" "Amen sister!" I say.

A Prelude

The story above is an amalgamation of experiences other Black women and I have shared with one another over my 8-year teaching career. But you, dear reader, may be wondering: why share such a story, what does it all mean, and what does it matter if situations from the narrative above occur daily in our public schools? The purpose of the public school system in the United States is to educate and socialize students so they can one day become citizens who defend and

maintain our democracy. But what happens when the system is corrupted and easily swayed by the evils of racism and enveloped in a white supremacist system? What or rather, who bears the brunt of the effects of a depraved and malformed educational system? Is it those who are as Lorde (2007) calls “othered” in society, or is it the faces that Bell (1992) envisioned “at the bottom of the well?”

Now depending on your race, sex, or social class if you are still reading, you may be wondering so what, and why should I care what happens to them? To answer your question, or perhaps create a new line of questioning, I conclude the prelude of this dissertation with a quote from a German pastor who lived through World War II and toured Germany during 1946, confessing his regret at failing to act when he saw the tide of hate rising in his nation. Hockenos (2018) shares the quote often repeated in Pastor Martin Niemöller’s sermons:

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

Devotion

How can we create an educational system where Black women feel supported and encouraged to engage curriculum content, life, and experiential knowledge while honoring their personal codes of wellness? This dissertation explores the educational experiences of three activist Black women teachers, all born in the 1900’s, but whose teaching careers span several different decades of time. The purpose of this study is twofold: to understand the experiences of three activist Black women teachers and document the practices they use to stay well. Using oral

history as a methodology and photovoice to capture the stories of each teacher, this work is grounded in Africana Diasporic theory and Womanism (Maparyan, 2006, 2012; A. Walker, 2004) which centers the experiences of everyday Black women, uplifts the power of the Spirit, and focuses on grassroots movements for change. While using womanism as my frame, I also interrogated if participants were experiencing or engaging in motherhood (Case, 1997; Oyěwùmí, 1997; Stewart, 2013), which is an African centered approach to collectively rearing children in the community, and I investigated how they were bringing their activism into the classroom following a wave conservative policies.

This work stems from an unshakable question I have carried since arriving at the fictional Oppression Elementary School many years ago and hearing gospel music through the car windows of multiple educators. I wondered what was going on in their lives, in their classrooms, and in their hearts to motivate them to come to work and intentionally cover themselves in music that is filled with drums, snares, and words proclaiming the power of God's children? The title of this section, devotion, reminded me of my experiences in the Black church where dedication to one's wellness was seen as a birthright, and throughout this dissertation you will see titles that refer to the of sections of my church' weekly program. As a child I attended Greater Vine City Baptist church in Atlanta, GA. My church was only a mile away from an area called "The Bluff," which at one point in the nineties was the heroin capital of the U.S. My mother, who is an usher, and I would arrive early every Sunday to pass out flyers and fans in preparation for the service. As attendees would enter the church, the Deacons began singing, "A Charge to Keep I Have" and not before long, church members would start crying and wailing along with them. The sounds reminded me of a funeral dirge, and I was often confused as to why anyone would start a church service in this fashion.

My untrained ear was deaf to the sounds of the church's devotion, but now, I understand the moaning and groaning of prayers when words are no longer enough is steeped in our humanity and directly related to our survivance. Anishinaabe scholar and writer Gerald Vizenor describes survivance as an act that goes beyond survival and is rooted in the Indigenous peoples practice of storytelling about how they live and navigate the current world as victorious people with knowledge instead of reciting the Western stories which paint them as victims (2008). The Spirit of survivance brought the church members to praise and worship and brought me to this dissertation.

Black women and their capacity to love and maintain devotion to educating children whom Western society has deemed unlovable transcends the physical to an ethic of nurturing, care, and activism that when enacted can change the course of our lives and the world. The path to devotion is nonlinear, but through documenting the paths that Black women have taken to maintaining their wellness, I am undertaking an exploration into how teaching, wellness, and the Spirit from a womanist theoretical perspective could be connected. My inexperienced ears heard the howling of the deacons and misunderstood their sounds for pain, but now I understand that the music of devotion was designed to elicit a response to the Spirit. The Black church has long served as a refuge for the community and even during the period of enslavement, Blacks used music and the gospel to give them hope that their conditions would change, and freedom would be the birthright of their children. Music also played an integral role in outlining the path to freedom, passing down the stories of victorious ancestors, and uniting the Spirits of the many who were working in the fields and treated like property. For Black people music has been a way of documenting and rejoicing about our humanity.

My personal experiences as a classroom teacher guided me through the creation of this dissertation. I decided to do an oral history with Black women teachers because of the knowledge that elder Black women educators passed down to me through storytelling. They had so many gems on how to survive the school year. Ultimately though, it was my own orientation towards activism that encouraged me to see this work through.

When I was an elementary school teacher, I directed my students through the Action Research process. I wanted them to see themselves as change agents who could make a difference in their communities. I saw my work as a form of activism, and it was empowering and rewarding. Yet, despite all the gems I had pocketed from elders and the life changing work I was doing in the classroom, I left after five years of teaching. I thought I had lost my devotion to a calling that was much bigger than me-- educating Black children-- but upon reflection I was tired of the system chewing me up and spitting me out with little care for my wellness. Therefore personally, this research stems from a driving curiosity concerning how all educational stakeholders can better support educators and subsequently combat the teacher attrition issue.

The issue of wellness is admittedly a hot button topic now. The world is still adjusting to a medical pandemic we have not seen the likes of since the Spanish Flu of 1918. With the abrupt shut down of schools and “non-essential” workers, I marveled at the ability of principals and school districts to surveil and critique teachers as they virtually tried to deliver their lessons regardless of their age or level of experience with technology. Womanist theory (Cooper, 1892; Walker, 2004; Evans, 2021; Dillard, 2022) suggests that when we encounter an issue, we should look back at what others have done to confront similar situations. This led me to visit the Georgia State University Library archives right before the pandemic shut everything down. I hoped to find interviews with Black women teachers. Sadly, I could not find one, so I asked the

head archivist for assistance, but she assured me that they did not have any interviews with Black women teachers in their stacks. What does it mean for Black women teachers to be absent from the archives? Does it imply we never existed or completed any task worth documenting? Imagine having access to the knowledge deck of Black women who survived past pandemics such as racism, sexism, and systemic oppression. The world may have been better prepared for COVID if they had the remedies Black women undoubtedly created to survive pandemics of the past. Johnson-Reagon (2019) in an NPR documentary, who emphasized not only the importance of history but the integral need to document the past, shared:

History is sacred because it is the only chance that you have of knowing who you are outside of what's been rained down upon you from a hostile environment... When you listen to the songs, oral documents created by African Americans from inside the community, that is another American story. It is sacred because it is connected with the very survival of the people. (lines 517-545)

Consequently, Black women teachers of the early twentieth century were often overlooked as important people to interview or pertinent additions to archives. Indeed, I subscribe to the view that the intersections of race, gender, and, consequently, class influence those whose histories are uplifted and ultimately recorded, and it is a travesty to see Black women teachers overlooked in the 21st century in one of the homes of civil rights, Atlanta, GA. According to the Black Teacher Collaborative, (2023) Georgia is only second behind Texas in the total number of Black educators in the United States. To see us absent from the archives in the heart of Atlanta, Georgia State University, which lauds itself as a top graduate of Black students and educators, speaks to the educational professions need for this work.

According to the Society of American Archivists, whether it is a document, photograph, or any firsthand memento, “These records are kept because they have continuing value to the creating agency and to other potential users. They are the documentary evidence of past events. They are the facts we use to interpret and understand history” (*What Are Archives? / Society of American Archivists*, 2016.). Archives are a reflection of their creators, and their very existence speaks to the power that generally white males have to preserve what they deem as essential and eliminate what they feel is useless (Schrag, 2021). Over the course of my research on Black women teachers, several archivists, such as Morna Gerad and Lisa Vallen of the Georgia State University Library archives, have lamented the lack of interviews or transcripts to assist my work and encouraged me to share any transcripts I collect during my research with Black women teachers to support their archives.

There is another glaring problem with the method of collecting and retaining only certain artifacts, in that history has a way of repeating itself. How can all of humanity benefit from the past when we don’t have all voices represented to whisper their shortcomings and hopefully guide us further away from the brink of self-destruction? The collection of oral histories from Black women teachers will ultimately help future Black women teachers as they navigate teaching Black children in public schools where bureaucrats and school boards devalue the lives and learning experiences of Black children.

The intent of this work is to produce new knowledge on the life experiences of Black women teachers in Atlanta and address the erasure of Black women teachers from the archives. Discourse on the topics of teaching, wellness, and pandemics is necessary to incorporate in this research because we sometimes think of extraordinary events, such as COVID-19 as commonplace. The documentation of the visceral experiences of Black women teachers in the

present without the optimism that space and time often give us may assist future Black women teachers to stay encouraged about teaching. I also hope policy makers will review the oral histories shared and use the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of Black women teachers as a starting point to draft bills that improve the teaching profession. We need discourse and policies that center experiences of Black women because when we center the needs of Black women, we ensure that the needs of humanity are met (Taylor, 2017).

Research Question

One primary research question guides this dissertation:

- 1) How do three self-identified activist Black women teachers resist the multiple forms of oppression and marginalization they face in the U.S. as they navigate their educational and professional journeys?

Exploring the Connection Between Wellness and Attrition

The major issue in this study is the wellness of activist Black women teachers (BWT). Existing scholarship documents various ways that Black women teachers encounter obstacles and roadblocks in the form of a white-centered curriculum, lack of support, and educational policies meant to police them and their teaching methods (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, 2019; Evans & Leonard, 2013; Hancock et al., 2020; King & Swartz, 2015, 2018; Sojoyner, 2016). Teachers are not immune to the happenings of society, and some have left their careers or have been pushed out because their responses to racial injustice and violence against Black people, are seen as unacceptable in the current social climate.

The hostile teaching environment and laws restricting the teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT) or LGBTQ issues are just some of the reasons that teachers are leaving their jobs

(Natanson & Balingit, 2022). James Whitfield, a former principal at Colleyville Heritage High School in Colleyville, Texas was accused of being anti-American because of an email he shared in the Summer of 2020. The email focused on the pain and terror he was experiencing as a Black man because of systemic racism and consequently the murder of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man killed by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Neuman, 2022). Sharing his thoughts through a letter was a strategy Whitfield used to address his feelings of unwellness. His predominately white community's response was to ostracize his words and gaslight his feelings.

The climate for teachers is inimical. Veteran Social Studies teacher Matthew Hawn, who taught at a school in northeast Tennessee, was fired in May 2021 after being reprimanded for having students read an essay by Ta-Nehisi Coates and watch a video of Kyla Lacey performing a poem she had written called White Privilege (2022). After teaching for 20 years, Christa Talbott, a Black woman teacher from New Orleans, quit after her school failed to develop and follow through with antiracist policies and practices that met teachers, students, and the community at the points of their needs. After fighting with the school board and experiencing racial battle fatigue she resigned from her position and shared, "I was tired of being quiet. I was tired of sitting back so that white people could feel comfortable" (Carr, 2022). Parents are fighting at school board meetings across the country demanding a ban on teaching Critical Race Theory (Schwartz, 2021) as the educational debt, (Ladson-Billings, 2006) meaning the historical, monetary, and social debts owed to Black students and students of color, steadily rises and has only been exacerbated by the Covid 19 pandemic.

Not only are teachers prohibited from sharing concerns about curriculum and social justice issues by their administration and school boards, but they must also worry about their personal safety in school buildings. In January 2023, a Black metro Atlanta high school teacher

was attacked by a Black female student, in the middle of her classroom while students looked on recording the incident with their phones. She spent over a week in the hospital with a broken leg (Fernandes, 2023). We are in a crisis. Black people live in a perpetual state of rage (NPR, 2020; Thepostarchive, 2016), wondering when the next injustice will happen, understanding we live in a system that has little regard for Black lives (McCoy, 2020; Santhanam, 2020). Tyre Nichols, an unarmed Black man was beaten to death by five Memphis police officers, and the video of his murder was circulated on social media which is damaging not only to the psyche of young people but also to the wellbeing of adults (Marks, 2023). The stories shared above provide a glimpse into the predicament Black teachers face in the United States of America; therefore, the issue remains, how do Black women teachers deal with the constant onslaught of violence, hate, and fear and maintain their wellness?

For this research, I focused on three activist Black women teachers, introducing the term wellness activism to describe how teachers stand up for and fight for their wellness even when the curriculum, school system, and society refuse to provide space for them to do so. I utilize the theoretical framework of womanism (Africana), which Hudson-Weems (1995) describes as an ideology that focuses on the demands, experiences, and struggles of Africana Diasporic women. I sought to understand how Black women display some of the attributes of Africana womanism which immediately connects to the ways by which Black women may practice motherhood, a concept introduced by Oyewumi (Stewart, 2013) that focuses on women's engagement with social change and an African-centered collective approach to taking care of children, whether through teaching children or rearing children that may or may not be your own. Oyewumi uses the Yoruba concept of Omoya, translated into "my mother's children" (2003, p. 12) to explore motherhood. She states that motherhood "functions to locate the individual within a socially

recognized grouping... and emblemizes unconditional love, togetherness, unity, solidarity and loyalty” (p. 12). This dissertation asked Black women teachers about their experiences with motherhood in order to further research and document how such a concept may interact with their wellness practices.

Because of my own experiences with wellness, unwellness, and activism in relation to teaching, which will be explored at a greater depth in Chapter Three, this dissertation is grounded in concepts of wellness practices viewed through the lens of Africanity, womanism, and motherhood (Collins, 1996; Hudson-Weems, 1993; Maparyan, 2018). We urgently need to understand how Black women teacher activists navigate the curriculum, administration, and pandemics in schools if we want to combat our current teacher shortage. This work sheds light upon how the different pandemics interact with their wellness, understanding wellness to encompass everything from the physical to the metaphysical world, emphasizing the Spirit/ual practices three BWT employed in their careers.

The Scripture: African Ways as a Foundation for Knowing

A scripture from the gospel always follows a period of devotion. The purpose of the scripture is to reorient our minds and hearts to what the Creator has promised us. From an African womanist perspective, knowledge aims to advance humanity and spirit encompasses all living things. Therefore, by gaining wisdom, we are undertaking the process of becoming better humans. My world sense (Oyewumi, 2001) is grounded in African epistemology which uplifts scholarly teachings and research on African ways of knowing and being. In Chapter Three, I will go into greater depth on how my epistemology influenced the research, but it is important to note the braided approach I took to this study. Spirit, struggle against oppression, and research were interwoven into every aspect of this work. In the next section, I will discuss another integral

theme of this research, pandemics. Research concerning the pandemics of racism, sexism, white supremacy, and medical pandemics is introduced here in Chapter One, but dissected further in Chapter Two.

Prayers, The Gift that Keeps on Giving: Pandemics

As the world is living amid a global pandemic, Black women teachers were required to change their delivery methods for instruction, teach from home, and maintain their family's well-being, often leaving their wellness last. Black women perpetually operate in an oppressive society that attempts to leave them at the mercy of pandemics such as racism, sexism, and white supremacy (Collins, 1990). According to Merriam-Webster, a pandemic is "an outbreak or product of sudden rapid spread, growth, or development" (2021). Sandra L. Shullman, president of the American Psychological Association, released a statement concerning the tariff racism has on Black Americans:

We are living in a racism pandemic, which is taking a heavy psychological toll on our African American citizens. The health consequences are dire. Racism is associated with a host of psychological consequences, including depression, anxiety, and other serious, sometimes debilitating conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder and substance use disorders. Moreover, the stress caused by racism can contribute to the development of cardiovascular and other physical diseases. (*"We Are Living in a Racism Pandemic," Says APA President, 2020*)

Black women teachers must suppress the genuine fear of losing their lives or their students' lives as they watch police officers and white vigilantes murder people of color and continuously come to work and teach. We must temporarily suspend reality to teach our students while dealing with

the likelihood of a principal coming into our classrooms unannounced to observe us, which could lead to us losing our livelihood. The policies that police Black women teachers are cruel. People of color experience authentic microaggressions on a daily basis, hence the mass exodus of Black women from the workplace (Bunn, 2021).

Significance of Research

The insight from this research lies in the wisdom of Black women telling their stories, testifying, and imparting the knowledge they have learned. While this chapter has introduced but a smidgen of the pandemics and subsequently, the crisis Black women teachers are currently encountering in the educational profession, this research sought to understand the ways by which three Black women teacher activists navigate the landmines of teaching through the use of interviews, artifacts, and photovoice activities submitted by each BWT.

Previous scholars have written about teacher attrition and the various experiences of Black women teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, 2019; Gray et al., 2015; Ingersoll et al., 2018). Using mixed methods Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond researched the teacher attrition problem through surveying and interviewing Black teachers. Others, such as Beaubouf-Lafontant (2002) have researched how Black women teachers engage in “womanish” practices like ethics of care. Wade-Gayles (2002) and Dillard (2012, 2020) have studied spirit and teaching using womanist theory, defining spirit as “stepping out on faith or being pushed back to strength” (Dillard et al., 2000). My research differs and intends to fill a gap in the literature in that I aim to understand the wellness practices K-12 activist Black women teachers engage in which gives them the strength to show up in a classroom and teach Black children in a society that does not care about their lives or the lives of their Black students.

Influenced by Maparyan (2012), a womanist theorist, this work emphasizes wellness as being interconnected to all facets of one's life, highlighting the idea that what happens outside of ourselves can impact our inner experiences. She argues, "From a womanist perspective, all people have a right to live in conditions that are not merely physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, socially, and environmentally adequate, but rather are positively superlative" (p. 44). Black women deserve wellness to the highest degree, but this idea is often neglected, even by Black women. We can teach a masterclass on ways to navigate stress and maintain the fight until our perpetual freedom is won, but through a womanist lens, this research addresses what gives us the Spirit, strength, and courage to do so? To understand how today's Black women understand and practice wellness, I believe it is essential to look first at the blueprints that Black women teachers of the past have left for us and using this as a starting point is an integral piece of safeguarding the wellness of the people.

Black women have the codes and might give society the keys to teacher longevity, if only we take the time to listen. Academically, conversation and research on Black teacher wellness is essential because of the social foundations of this land. Policy makers need to understand that wellness is multifaceted and multidimensional. Wellness in the individual sense is the ability to be free and have access to the means to meet yourself at the points of your needs mentally, physically, spiritually, emotionally, financially etc. Knowledge on teacher wellness could be essential to combating teacher attrition as Georgia law makers continue to enact and uphold policies that diminish the agency and knowledge of educated professionals. There is power in recognizing we are interconnected and that we can purposefully work as a collective to transmute the lives of Black women teachers and, consequently, our world. I pose the question: What are

some ways Black women of the past maintained their wellness in the face of their life's pandemics?

Operational Definitions

Several terms used in this study are defined below to clarify their use within the context of this study.

Activism: taking a stand and advocating for one's beliefs through action.

Africana Womanism: According to Hudson Weems (1993), it is an ideology that centers on the experiences, needs, and struggles of ALL African women with the goal of African women creating their own ways and terms of describing and assessing their experiences.

Afrocentricity: Using an African frame of reference to culturally ground one in their cultural past to better understand their current location and potential future.

Black: referring to people of African descent

Codes: practices or ideas one lives by.

Devotion: the act of worship, dedicating one's self, and showing love.

Ma'at: virtues one should live by: truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, order, and reciprocity.

Modernity: the era of mercantilism and consequently capitalism.

Motherhood: an African-centered collective approach to taking care of children, whether it be through teaching children or rearing children that may or may not be your own. Oyewumi (2003) contends, "motherhood" goes beyond gender and acts as an ethic and ideology that can transcend the sanguine, anchoring the Black child in a world that means to toss them ashore.

Pandemic: an outbreak or sudden rapid growth.

Spirit/Spirituality: all that has or has had life. The practice of being present in ones body and using ones energy in conjunction with others or the universe to engender change.

Survivance: a term developed by Anishinaabe Scholar Gerald Vizenor to describe the Indigenous practice of living and resisting while surviving.

Testifyin’: Smitherman (1997) defines testifyin’ as a “concept referring to a ritualized form of Black communication in which the speaker gives verbal witness to the efficacy, truth, and power of some experience in which all Blacks have shared” (p. 58). Originating in the Black spiritual tradition, testifyin’ can be done anytime and anywhere.

Wellness: health and wellbeing. Living in alignment with one's beliefs, encompassing the physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, social, and environmental dimensions. Embodying a recognition of love and a desire for what is right and just on a personal, communal, and global level.

Wellness Activism: the radical and conscious act of prioritizing one's wellness and the wellness of one's community despite political or societal pressures which advocate for one to do otherwise.

Womanist: “A Black feminist or feminist of color who loves other women, is committed to survival and wholeness of an entire people, loves music, loves dance, loves the moon, loves the Spirit” (Walker, 2004, p. x).

Womanist Theology: an ethic and methodology grounded in the moral and spiritual beliefs of Black women that responds to their experiences with oppression and life’s pandemics.

Organization of the Dissertation (The Welcome)

This dissertation was organized with the Spirit that shapes so much of Black life and with the idea of survivance in mind. Survivance is about being whole and carrying the knowledge

passed down through one's ancestors in a way that empowers the community and reminds them of their strength. As African Americans we too have practiced survivance, and because of this research I have come to see the stories and acts of the Black educators in this dissertation as evidence of such. The morning rituals, lunch time revelations, and end of the school day hugs shared at the beginning of this chapter echo what I saw in my Black church as a child. Therefore, I use sub-headings that refer to the order of service from my church as thematic organizers throughout the dissertation. Each piece is dedicated to addressing the whole human: mind, body, heart, and spirit. Each subheading speaks to the order we used to invite the Spirit into our spiritual home.

Chapter One of this dissertation provided the purpose and focus of this study. It outlined what is being researched, why this topic is being researched, and the importance of this research to the profession of education. Chapter Two outlines the theoretical framing of this work and situates literature pertinent to the topic of Black women teachers, activists, wellness, and life's pandemics in prospect to history. Chapter Three delineates the epistemological framework, methodologies used to shape this study, how the methodologies were employed, data collection, and a detailed description of the women I had the honor of interviewing. Chapter Four presents the findings of this research and the oral histories of three self-ascribed Black women teacher activists in order to address the research question guiding this work. Finally, Chapter Five concludes with a discussion of the major findings of this research, including wellness activism, as it relates to literature. Implications and recommendations for educational stakeholders and policy makers are also presented as a result of the findings presented in this dissertation.

2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter discusses selected literature related to the wellness of Black women and Black women teacher activists, focusing on how they have encountered and resisted multiple forms of oppression and marginalization. This chapter also synthesizes pertinent research and scholarship related to the theoretical framework of Womanism (Africana), which will guide this study. The review of the literature includes an examination of writings on Black Feminist Thought, womanism, spirituality, and motherhood, in relation to Black women and BWT experiences. Lastly, this chapter addresses literature on the experiences of historical Black women activists, paying special attention to their wellness practices, and ends with a review of current research on Black teacher attrition and retention.

From the Choir: What's Race Got to Do with It?

The story of people from the continent we have come to call Africa begins thousands of years ago. Starting with Africa as the foundation of civilization directly combats the debilitating American education system and curriculum we see in today's public schools. Race is a social construct (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) created during the period of modernity by Europeans attempting to justify their maltreatment of Africa and people of African descent in order to gain and consequently maintain power. The pursuit of and maintenance of capital for Europeans and consequently whites, is one of the reasons we currently contend with racism.

"The History Book" (Rydberg, 1976) chronicles how mercantilism evolved into capitalism which marks the onset of modernity and consequently, racism. Before the 1400s, Africa, Europe, and Asia were not continents as we know them today. They were an independent, unconnected spattering of kingdoms, villages, and cities. Starting in the 1400s unlanded Europeans worked for the landed while merchants traveled throughout different

kingdoms in Europe, using the buying and selling of goods across the land to make themselves rich. Though the merchants were making money, they found themselves in constant opposition with landowners, so they went about the work of empowering kingdoms so that they could in return, have the freedom to pillage and plunder the poor with less local resistance. Merchants promised the Kings that they would bring riches from other countries, and it was greed that led the kingdoms of Europe to finance excursions into Africa, India, and the Americas. Rydberg shares, that upon European arrival to the continent of Africa, they learned that the people did not want or need any of the things that Europe was offering. From a trading standpoint, the Christian merchants was inferior to the African world. As a result of hate, anger, and jealousy, Kings from Europe financed Christian merchants (Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, 2021) to pillage and plunder Africa's port cities, just as ships were also landing and settling in what came to be known as the Americas. This history changed the course of the African world as we know it and experience it in the present.

Gordon (2008) defines the modern world as a site where Europe has attempted to dominate and destroy all things opposite of male and white, which is evidenced by its clashes with the majority of the endarkened world who consistently resist its domination. Europe was in the Dark Ages before the period of modernity and blocked by Afro-Islamic established routes (p. 16). Though Spain was ruled by the Moors, which were Black people, once the Spanish regained their freedom, they looked to make money and conquer the world like the Portuguese. The Atlantic Slave trade, according to Gordon, is a significant marker for the start of modernity. In African Philosophy, African philosophers like Ibn Rushd taught and contributed to what Europeans defined as philosophy and reason (p. 28). Yet, Europeans used the church and blackness to justify enslaving Africans. The church disregarded the evidence of African thought

and humanity by declaring that people from Africa's skin color "reflected an absence, if not simply a darkness, of soul" (Gordon, 2008, p. 29). They used this rationale to explain the transporting and forced removal of millions of Africans for over three hundred years. With the onset of modernity, there has become a new way of thinking about oneself and the "others" of the world.

In the nascent years of the United States, whites used propaganda and curriculum to create "Black" as a racial location, marking Black individuals as savages who require constant surveillance in their civilized society. Using pseudoscience, media, and art, from a young age, whites in the U.S. were taught that Blacks were less than human (Au et al., 2016). The Daughters of the Confederacy made textbooks and curriculum the focal point of their organizations mission and advocated that states in the South use texts that rewrite the Souths wicked deeds in reference to slavery, racism, and the Civil War (Huffman, 2019). Past actions directly impact the present. At the turn of the twentieth century, when this country had the opportunity to teach the facts of history, textbook companies turned their backs on the truth in pursuit of capital. The dialectical relationships of the haves and have nots and blackness in opposition to whiteness keeps everyone engaged in a fight that can distract us from our humanity. For whites who subscribe to "conceptual whiteness" (King, 1995) notions, they fight to maintain white supremacy and privilege out of fear, while Black people who advocate against oppression do so because it is our inalienable right to be free (Davis, 2011). Black women are well versed in the freedom struggle, and they often find themselves facing issues beyond the binary of the dialectic, using their talk, time, and talent to sustain and resist on multiple levels of existence for themselves and their communities.

Black Feminism: Sexism as a Pandemic

Race, class, and gender create interlocking levels of oppression (Collins, 2002; hooks, 2014; Lorde, 2007) that unnecessarily create obstacles in the lives of Black women, often stealing our power and making it difficult for us to alter our situations. Unfortunately, race and class can influence access to a good education, a well-paying career, and premium healthcare. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality to describe the multiple layers in which Black women face discrimination and oppression. She maintains “any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated” (p. 140). Understanding the avenues, corners, and corridors of Black women’s lives is essential because close examination of these areas illuminates that we do not live single issue lives. Black women are often tasked as the superheroes who will save America from her ills (Scelfo, 2019) while challenging invisibility and demanding justice for our families as we have done for several centuries. Black Feminist Thought served as a launching pad for me to understand how whiteness as a system functions to manufacture pandemics and consequently, attempt to alienate Black women from their full humanity

The issues which Black women are facing are not only encapsulated by the issue race, but we also contend with sexism, which affects our overall wellness. Lorde defines sexism as “the belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over the other and thereby the right to dominance” (2007, p. 105). Traditionally teaching was seen as a man’s profession, and women were forced to remain unmarried and without children if they wanted to remain in this profession. Sexism influences women's quality of life (hooks, 2000) even when they have the same credentials as a man.

A scholar of Black Feminism, hooks, confronted how mainstream America interprets feminism. She argued that some try to define it as equality to men, while others call all feminist lesbians and man-haters (hooks, 2014), but she maintained that feminism is for everyone. The point of feminism, at least from the hooks' point of view, is to eradicate gender-based oppression. Hooks maintained that the system of patriarchy causes everyone to suffer and undoubtedly causes Black women to suffer most egregiously. White feminists do not contend with issues of racism. They do not have to worry about their children being killed in the streets because they are Black.

The Eurocentric, white supremacist system influences the methods by which Black men and women have come to interact with one another, and writings from the Black Feminist Thought perspective can help us to understand that it is not men that are the problem, but the system that teaches and reinforces oppressive behaviors. DiAngelo (2018) maintains that whiteness carries “social and institutional status and identity imbued with legal, political, economic, and social rights and privileges that are denied to others” (p. 35). The social construction of whiteness thrives on the narrative that the closer one is to whiteness, the better their potential outcomes. Black feminism was created in response to the pandemic of sexist oppression and centers the cultural and social experience of Black women. While the pandemic of sexism attempts to constrain and silence Black women, theory can provide a way for us to unite and organize to advocate for better outcomes for ourselves and our communities. However, to do the work needed, we have to be well. The legacy of racism and sexism has lasting effects on our environments and seemingly brings about health disparities in the lives of Black women.

Race and Medical Pandemics

White supremacy as a system can be paralyzing to the lives of Black women. Racism and sex discrimination are but a few of the reasons why the Centers for Disease Control reports that nearly 60% of Black women over the age of 20 are suffering from hypertension (NCHS, 2019), and the leading cause of death amongst Black people is heart disease (CDC & NCHS, 2021). The pandemics mentioned above, in conjunction with other pandemics as noted in the Black Woman's Health Imperative, such as housing, labor, and health disparities (Black Women's Health Imperative, 2021), are pushing Black women to the brink. Our Black girls are being hit the hardest as they grow up in a society that constantly communicates images of their inferiority and worthlessness (Bailey, 2021; Caron, 2021). We live in a perfect storm of issues that have been greatly exacerbated due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19). Though these statistics speak to a time before COVID, if they echo our starting point in understanding the consequences of the interlocking pandemics, one can only imagine how the stress caused by Covid has impacted Black women and their ability to be well.

Pennant (2022) studied the impact of COVID-19 on Black women graduates in Britain. Recognizing COVID as a "pandemic within a pandemic" (p. 533) she maintains that COVID has hit Black women the hardest because many of them did not have access to work from home job opportunities. As a Black woman researcher for Britain, she used Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Epistemology to question while Black women are busy saving their communities who is doing the work of helping and uplifting them. She maintains that the physical, mental, and emotional strain of Black women as they fought for justice in the Black Lives Matter movement and advocated for Black women like Breonna Taylor to get justice after being wrongfully murdered by the police, caused more strain than average on the psyche of Black

women. She interviewed 25 Black women who had graduated within the past 3 years in 2017. She notes, while the interviews were completed before the pandemic the pandemic caused her to revisit the interviews and analyze them through the lens of COVID-19. She also cited a lack of research about Black women graduates in Britain as her reasoning for revisiting data. Pennant found that her participants were already carrying a burden of care for themselves and their communities. Though this research was created outside of the United States, it speaks to what Black women were carrying before the pandemic and leaves us to question how Black women, who may have already felt the burden of care on their shoulders, maintained with added addition of COVID-19. The intersectional obstacles of Black women in relation to COVID-19 needs further attention. However, we can look to how Black women in the past survived pandemics related to the medical field for clues on how we can prepare ourselves to come out of the current medical pandemic with our community intact.

Jones et al. (2009) discuss the social determinates of health and equity, arguing that one's experiences with health and healthcare are tied less to their genetics and lifestyle choices than the white media wants the world to believe. The authors maintain that the construction of race and its legacy of racism prevent Black people from having equal treatment as whites in terms of medical care, prevention, and wellness. While a 2013 study by the Black Women's Health Imperative suggests that 50% of Black women report feeling well (2019), we still experience numerous health disparities as a result of racism (Chinn et al., 2021). Jones et al. argues that we need policies and practices that pull the Black population away from the proverbial cliff of medical pandemics and address issues of equity concerning how resources are divided amongst the population, but when Black people have been used by the medical field as guinea pigs, how are we to trust that they will ever have our best interests at heart?

Black people in America have always had to duck and dodge the prod of the white man's needle. Henrietta Lacks had her cells stolen and used for the profit of all mankind without her family's knowledge or permission (Skloot, 2010). The morals and ethics of doctors in the American medical field seem to go missing when Black people are their patients. For over 40 years doctors in Alabama conducted The Tuskegee Syphilis experiment leaving hundreds of Black men with untreated syphilis and a legacy of "medical mistrust" in Black people across the United States (Duff Brown, 2017). However, these actions are not new. The medical field has a long history of misusing Black people, and specifically Black women, in the United States.

Cooper Owens (2018) focuses on how science, precisely the medical field, benefited from the dehumanization of Black women. *Medical Bondage* examines how and why Black women's "reproductive medicine was essential to the maintenance and success of southern slavery, especially during the antebellum era," (2018, p. 4) which saw the largest sale of Black women than any other time period in this nation's history. Owens homes in on the fathers and heroes of gynecology arguing that racism and a lack of ethics motivated them to perform surgeries on Black women without anesthesia or consent. While they documented and published their works for prestige and financial gain, Black women suffered and died at the hands of doctors who were supposed to save their lives. Even today, Black women experience higher mortality rates when giving birth (Brangham & Dubnow, 2023). The experiences of our foremothers beg us to question if any doctor who does not look like us can care for us safely and with love. Our past makes way for our present and provides better context for the figures and facts presented on the current health status of Black women. While these numbers signal not only a critical moment in the lives of Black women, but it also speaks to the pandemic that Black

mothers will pass down to their daughters if we do not make intentional steps to interrupt the impact of the many pandemics on our lives.

Without a doubt, Black women feel the effects of life's many pandemics even if they do not always have the words to express their experiences. Evans et al. (2017) argue that the consciousness of Black women goes far beyond what Du Bois termed "double consciousness," to include the ways by which our class, religion, sexuality, and ability status influence our identity and how we are treated in the world. Throughout the oral histories conducted in this research period the three Black women teachers interviewed spoke to the stress of their profession in conjunction with racism, social issues, and their wellness. Besides racism and sexism, Black women are also experiencing an ongoing, and seemingly endless pandemic called white supremacy, which is consequently evidenced by the medical disparities we experience when giving birth or navigating COVID-19. While this section considered the intersections of race, gender, and medical pandemics, it also introduced Black feminism as a foundational theory that can be used to make meaning of the experiences of Black women in the United States.

The next section will outline the theoretical framework of this study, including the theories, methods, and literature on Black women teachers of the past and their wellness. Womanist theories undergird this research and guided me as I analyzed literature, designed the research, and analyzed the results. While feminism focuses on women fighting for equality, Black feminism centers the experiences of Black women and their plight against patriarchy and racism. Womanism takes these theories a step further by incorporating the power of grassroots organizing, spirit, and the power of the everyday Black woman. As we navigate these trying times, womanism may serve as the change agent that can help us all plot a course to a future where we all are well.

Tithes: Womanism and Wellness

Womanism is an offering just like the tithes one gives in church, it gives freely, but also has those who are suffering at the front of its mind. Womanism recognizes the multiple levels of oppression placed on Black people across the Diaspora due to imperialism and colonialism and argues we must work together as women and men to change our world because, ultimately, our survival is intertwined. Womanism is an integral piece of my theoretical framework, and its principles guided this dissertation. Walker (2004) defines Womanist as “Opposite of girlish, i.e., frivolous irresponsible, not serious... From the Black folk expression of mothers to female children, “You acting womanish,” i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful behavior... Responsible. In charge. Serious” (p. xi). Her book *In Search of our Mothers’ Garden* took a collection of essays and poems she had written over a twenty-year span and laid the foundation for what we have come to call womanism today.

Much of Walker’s essay’s touch on how Black women have taken life and created masterpieces with whatever little material they were given to work with. While she provides her thoughts on everything from Civil Rights, including an interview with Coretta Scott King, she also tells her story of searching for Black writer and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston. In her recovery of Hurston’s voice, this tome exhibits womanisms way of going back to recover and consequently uplift stories of Black women. Her understanding of womanism laid the groundwork for me and motivated me to also want to do the work of recovering the stories of extraordinary Black women teachers. While Walker served as a springboard for my understanding of womanism, Maparyan’s writings on womanism extended the work of Walker and helped me theorize what research done with and for Black women could look like in the present.

According to Maparyan (2012), womanism is composed of five main tenets. Womanism is antioppressionist in nature, meaning that it is against all oppressions, named and unnamed, that we as people encounter in this world. It is also vernacular and concerned with the lived experiences of everyday people lending power to the ability of everyday people to spark a fire through grassroots organizing. Womanism is also nonideological. It is focused on uniting people instead of drawing lines in the sand and advocating that one tradition is better than another, allowing people to harness their energy and spirits from a place of love in order to regain their humanity. Next, it is communitarian and is grounded in collectivism, aiming for everyone to reach a state of wholeness and well-being. Lastly, according to Maparyan, womanism is spiritualized. Like the Egyptians in early Africa, womanism recognizes that we are all interconnected and that our spiritual connection can drive us to bring about social justice changes. In my own understanding of womanism, I have come to take it as a reconceptualizing of Maat. Maatian virtues, values, and ethics maintain that humans are “bearers of divinity and dignity” (Asante & Mazama, 2005, p. 316) meaning we are interconnected with all living things and have a responsibility to move with the highest good in deeds and actions.

Wellness from a womanist perspective centers on the “superlatives” (Maparyan, 2012) of the human experience. When a womanist talks about wellness, she acknowledges that it encompasses “physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, social, and environmental dimensions” (p. 44). In her definition of wellness, Maparyan emphasizes wellness as being interconnected to all facets of one’s life, emphasizing the notion that what happens outside of ourselves can impact our inner experiences. We should always be searching to bring about a balance between ourselves and the cosmos. Womanism is about purposefully lifting Black women, Black people, and Black stories, combating the identities forced upon us by our jobs, families, and the greater

world. Maparyan goes on to describe how Womanism can be used as a tool to combat any hegemonic narratives when she shares:

Womanism is very much about the personal spiritual journey- bringing it from behind the shadows, owning it, and forging new pathways through dialogue and interpersonal sharing that allow us all to be enriched by one another's personal spiritual journeys and reimagine communities along new lines of affinity and sacredness. (2013, p. xv)

In a Womanist sense, by sharing our experiences, we simultaneously reach back and teach the next generation about what is possible to those who believe. This act provides an outline for our children to reimagine what could be in a world where pandemics all pandemics are eradicated. In all, womanism is collectivist in action, antioppressionist in that it centers on the power of the grassroots and the experiences of everyday Black women and believes in the power of the Spirit to transmute the physical condition into an experience that brings about the liberation of all people. The components of womanism bears characteristics that all spun from centering the experiences of Black women to create change for the Black family, the Black community, and finally oppressed people at large. While this work was conceptualized through a womanist framework, it also utilizes Africana Womanist theory.

Womanism (Africana)

Though Walker coined the term womanism, several other thinkers were simultaneously considering what it meant to be Black and reject the urge to consistently refer to your colonizers for the languages and theories to describe yourself. Hudson-Weems brought the term Africana Womanist to light, insisting that we needed something different than Black Feminism, we needed an ideology entrenched in the culture and experiences of not only African women but also their descendants across the Diaspora. Hudson-Weems (1993) maintains that the significant

difference between feminism and Africana womanism is that Africana womanism starts with the Black woman's thoughts, experiences, and needs but also attends to the togetherness of Black women, men, and consequently the Black family. Feminism primarily centers women and her experiences with sexism but fails to address how race and class also influence the experiences of Black women across the Diaspora (Hudson-Weems, 2001). On feminism, Hudson-Weems shares, "Feminism, a term conceptualized and adopted by white women, involves an agenda that was designed to meet the needs and demands of that particular group" (1993, p. 22). I agree with Hudson-Weems as she maintains that the oppressions that Black women face is inherently linked to our blackness. Therefore, we cannot afford to focus on gender only because Black men and children also face oppression. Before we discuss gender or class, we must be intentional in recognizing that whites socially constructed the idea of race to justify slavery. It was a way to dehumanize our existence. Hudson-Weems goes on to pronounce that Feminism, specifically Black Feminism, has failed to unite Black people across the Africana Diaspora. The latter have similar roots as those living in Africa and are currently fighting similar battles with oppression. Like Walker suggests in her definition of womanism, Africana Womanism too calls for a commitment "to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (Walker 2004, p. x), this theory insists that when we are united as Black people we can change our condition for the better, however the critics of Africana Womanism maintain that not all Black women and Black families matter in the struggle for social change.

Africana womanism is an ethic based on the survival of not only Black women but Black men and humanity as well; however a critique of Africana womanism is that it is non inclusive and may leave Black LGBTQ people on the margins of family and community building. Collins (1996) evokes an often overlooked piece of Walker's definition of womanism which states "A

woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually..." (2004, p. xi) maintaining that Black women wanted a different name than feminism to describe their fight against oppression because they did not want to identify with Black lesbians. Africana Womanism puts an emphasis on the Black family consisting of one Black woman and one Black man. While womanism welcomes all women. Collins maintains that the nuance in the differences between Black Feminism and Womanism mean little to nothing if we do not engage "in the difficult task of working through the diverse ways that black women have been affected by interlocking systems of oppression" (p. 16). Black women, including trans women, and members of the LGBTQ community, are all fighting for their humanity and the humanity of their families and communities. While this research considers Black Feminism, Womanism, and Africana Womanism as similar theories which center Black political and social freedom, more than anything this work is grounded in womanism's views on the Spirit, because it is the Spirit that reminds all African women that they have the agency to name their world and their experiences.

Spirit and Womanist Theology

Womanism centers on the interactions between our spirits and the Spiritual world with our lived realities, ascertaining that the former directly impacts the latter. This research focused on the Spirit and how it manifests to influence participants' experiences of wellness instead of exploring religion or participant religiosity, which centers on an organized and perhaps more traditional approach to religious activities. Dillard (2012) argues that spirit "defies definition: It is all that is" (p. 41). I agree with Dillard's statement; spirit permeates all living things, which is

why it is directly connected to our wellness. Using womanism as a frame, I considered the lives of three Black women teachers who consider themselves activists by applying the dimension of spirituality to our interviews. I wanted to understand what wellness looks and feels like for these Black women teachers as they live textured lives and how spirit interacts with their practices as they work to maintain their wellness. While spirit is a critical component of womanism, I am emphasizing the Spirituality of Black women because it signifies a relationship with “the invisibly permeating, ultimately positive, divine, and evolutionary energies that give rise to and sustain all that exists” (Hull & Hull, 2001, p. 2). Spirit provides another means for me to “see” Black women and allowed for me to conduct the oral history interviews with each woman’s layers in mind.

Lemons (2017) discusses his development as an “engaged” pedagogue. As a self-proclaimed feminist/womanist African American male, he found his identity by reading Hurston (1998), Walker (2004), and hooks’ (1994) fiction pieces. His book, *Caught up in the Spirit!* names the classroom as a powerful “site to practice pedagogy rooted in student transformation and self-liberation” (2017, p. x). Teaching from a womanist standpoint, he argues it is the Spirit that gives him the power to develop courses that asks students to read and write not only about their experiences with life’s pandemics but gives them the opportunity to “talk back” to the oppressive situations and structures they encounter in their lives.

This book is a case study documenting the author’s development from acting “stereotypically white” as a teen to uplifting and affirming his blackness through teaching as a man. Defining teaching as his: activist practice of pedagogical soul work” (p. xxi), Lemons worked as a professor in the Northern and Southern regions of the United States hoping to bridge the mind-body divide Western notions of thought peddle to society. Using short stories written

by African Americans to stimulate dialogue amongst his students has helped Lemons challenge them to become social justice change agents. His work exemplifies how teachers may use the curriculum to make themselves well and help students along their path to wholeness and wellness. Like Lemons, my work is also grounded in the womanist tradition. However, our research departs in that I am studying how three teachers institute practices, similar to the ones he shared, to maintain their wellness and bring about the wellness of their students. His conception of community wellness as pedagogy has implications as to how the Spirit can motivate teachers to want to teach students. Spirit helps us see ourselves in one another.

Dillard (2022) focuses on the Spirit and the role it plays in catapulting Black women teachers forward despite the injustices we face daily. She foregrounds this work with the knowledge that Black people, African American people, are directly connected to Africa and that our existence here in the Americas is not by chance. Dillard also exalts an African philosophy that recognizes that it is our ancestor's dedication to their survival that has paved the way for our existence, and this fact should not be taken lightly. Focusing on (re)membering, Dillard shares her own story of regaining her Africanity and, consequently, her connection to her spirit along with several Black women teachers who have participated in study abroad visits to Africa with her. She uses data from over several years and seventy-five students and faculty to understand how one's interactions with Africa, specifically Ghana, shape, challenge, and teach us as African Americans visiting the continent. She finds that Black women teachers go through the process of researching, revisioning, recognizing, representing, and finally reclaiming when we come into direct contact with our ancestral roots. As a result, we change, our teaching changes, and consequently, our students' lives and the lives of those in our community change when our spirits become grounded in its Africanity.

Like Evans (2021), she calls Black women to look inward, backward, and forward to help them tap into their spirit. Dillard is an important scholar when it comes to research on Black women teachers and the Spirit. I hope this work adds to what she has shared on the power of spirit in aiding our wholeness. Our work departs in that I am focusing on wellness and teacher activists. I plan to interview a smaller sample size of Black women to understand how spirit integrates into their wellness practices and how any physical, mental, emotional, or curricular practices play into their wellness. While I considered spirit and how it shows up in this research, I also worked to understand what Womanist writings on spirit had to say about Black women and their activism.

Black womanist theologian Delores Williams' argues that "the womanist theologian must search for the voices, actions, opinions, experience, and faith of women whose names sometimes slip into the male-centered rendering of black history, but whose actual stories remain remote." (2006, p. 117). Townes (2006) suggests that womanist theology is a "form of reflection" (p. 159) where Black women, their religion, and morals are centered. Womanist theology centers race, sex, and class as theological issues and questions of morals and ethics. While this dissertation does not focus on morals and ethics, womanist theology provided codes as to how work that focus on the Spirit should be predicated. Black women's social justice and activist works are inherently tied to the Spirit and faith based actions from a womanist theology perspective. Townes suggests that we should be asking ourselves, how is our hierarchy of needs affected based on race, class, and gender? I kept this question in my mind while reviewing the transcripts and photographs each woman shared with me, because having our needs met is a major part of wellness. Townes goes on to remind us that to say one is a "womanist, is confessional" (p. 164). We cannot place the title of womanist on anyone who has not claimed the name for themselves.

However we can look at Black women activist and work to understand how their activism often lies at the intersecting and interlocking sites of oppression. For Townes, one's spirit is not a separate entity but instead one that keeps them in alignment with God. She adds that womanist spirituality "is a social witness that speaks to issues of survival, social activism, self-worth, and self-esteem" (p. 172). Townes and womanist ethicist Katie Cannons many works on womanism and spirituality helped me frame not only my understanding of spirit but how spirit may work in conjunction with one's activism. These writings also made me consider the work of mothering and other mothering as not only a womanist act but an act of the Spirit.

Mothering

Roman Catholic theologian Diana Hayes maintains that "mothering" African American women are those who maintain nurturing traditions that reveal how their culture evolved; those grandmothers, aunts, mothers and older sisters form a community of women that sustains the Spirit within it" (Townes, 2006, p. 172). While her idea of mothering is grounded in the African American church, Nigerian born sociologist Oyewùmí suggests we should first start with the history of Africa before looking at mothering in an American context. We should look at the history of Africa in three terms; the lived experiences, the recorded experience, and finally, the written experiences, noting that the latter is most influenced by European ideology (Oyewumi, 1998). In looking at Africa, we can better understand how our education system in the West forces us to act as if there is a natural distinction between our bodies, distracting us, according to Oyewumi, from the real issue, which is that gender is a social construct and its meaning changes based on its cultural architect and location. She argues that sex and gender are a problem in Western feminism and says feminism operates on the premise that biology is a given category and creates theories and research that hinges upon this point of view. However, in some African

cultures, gender is associated with ones “social facts” (1997, p. 12), which obliterates talk of our bodies defining who we are and is a prominent critique of Western feminism, which rests on the Eurocentric focus on the body and what we see. Oyewumi offers the Yoruba of Nigeria as an example of African people whose social standing is based on seniority. In an African sense, African people must start by understanding our wholeness and, subsequently, our interconnectedness. Who we are is not influenced by our bodies but by all of our senses working as one to make sense of the world.

Being a mother is often associated first with being a woman in the Western world. In an African sense, this is problematic, considering the baggage that comes with the term woman. Woman limits the role and impacts all humans can have in influencing the lives of those their junior. Motherhood is an African-centered collective approach to taking care of children, whether through teaching children or *rearing* children who may or may not be your own. Oyewumi (2003) contends, “motherhood” goes beyond gender and acts as an ethic and ideology that can transcend the sanguine, anchoring the Black child in a world that means to toss them ashore.

Stewart (2013) credits Oyewùmí and Amadiume as seminal scholars who have examined the meaning of motherhood in the African sense. Amadiume’s matricentric theory, as read in Stewart, asserts motherhood as a connection to the Spirit, she posits that its meaning is “bound in the Spirit of common motherhood in the ideology and ritual of umunne-children of one mother- with its strong moral and spiritual force, binding members in love, care, compassion, peace and respect” (p. 64). From Amadiume’s point of view, wellness, spirit, and motherhood are interconnected. Oyewumi too suggests that motherhood, like spirit, is an ethic and a way of living. Stewart provides three examples of people across the Diaspora who she believes embody motherhood or matricentricity. She puts forward Clara Mohammad of the Nation of Islam, Iya

Melvina Rodney of Trinidad, and Leymah Gbowee of Liberia as practitioners of motherhood to thousands in a spiritual sense. Through their activism, they cared for and possibly saved the lives of young people. Their acts were also innately connected to their spirituality and belief in doing the work to better their communities. This research sought to find women who were making similar contributions to their students and the educational profession.

Considering womanism, spirit, and motherhood helped me frame and in the end, illuminate the many windows, doors, and entry ways Black women teachers employ to do the work of being well. The theories and concepts discussed in this section illustrate some of the traditions Black women have employed to make sense of their world as well as provided literature on the interconnectedness of the Spirit within Black women and Black communities. My work sought to understand if these ethics influenced the personal wellness of BWT. The next section of this dissertation delves into the historical lives of several Black women activists, who I believe moved in audacious ways and were ahead of their time. None of these women identified as womanist, but they all displayed characteristics that ultimately reflect notions of womanism, spirit, and motherhood.

Moving in Womanish Ways

Black women in the United States have always been dedicated to not only the survival of their people but maintaining Black survivance. Maria Stewart of Boston, acted in “womanish” ways by speaking in public forums, starting in 1831, which was against the norms of the day (Duran, 2020). Stewart’s belief in God gave her the courage to produce a pamphlet encouraging African Americans to organize against slavery and resist oppression in all forms. She imbued the Spirit into her work, maintaining that there was a moral way to live as children of Africa and that Blacks should never stop fighting against slavery in any form. While she gave speeches

encouraging Black women to stand up against subjugation, she also scolded free Black men who did little to change the conditions of Black women, similar to Cooper, who years later shared a similar sentiment.

Anna Julia Cooper moved with the gospel in her spirit and believed that the women's rights movement was bigger than a fight for women only, it was a plea for human rights. Black women were not valued for the intellectual contributions they were making to their race. Taking an intersectional approach to her advocacy, in 1886 Cooper went before the Black male clergy of the Protestant Episcopal church, in Washington D.C., maintaining that Blacks with power should devote their energy toward those who are Black, live in fear, and go without on a daily basis. While she did not call herself a womanist, her actions can be interpreted as matricentric, bold, and willful.

In Cooper's 1892, *A Voice from the South*, she criticizes Blacks of her day who advocated for partial freedom of the Black race through the guise of assimilation. She focused on issues of race, class, and gender, maintaining that each "ism" separated us as a people and left many in the Southern states to suffer. Another point Cooper makes is that there were Black people making money off of ideas that would uplift some, like Black men, to go to college and receive the opportunity to better themselves while leaving others to fend for themselves. Cooper delayed her doctoral studies to raise her brothers children and practiced motherhood by centering the "others" in her work. She also advocated for Black women to be seen, respected, and loved saying,

I am my Sister's keeper! should be the hearty response of every man and woman of the race, and this conviction should purify and exalt the narrow, selfish and petty personal aims of life into a noble and sacred purpose. (1892, p. 32)

Cooper's story is another example of how Black women worked to not only change conditions for themselves, but for all Black people who found themselves pushed to the margins because of their sex or income status. Sojourner Truth also stands as an example of a Black woman of the 19th century behaving in womanish ways.

In her 1851 speech, *Aint I a Woman*, Sojourner Truth questions why her race and positioning as a woman have never been of value to the U.S.A (Gray-White, 1999). Born into slavery in New York, Truth said the Spirit encouraged her to change her name at a time where white women were pushing for their rights and questioning the order of things. Truth questions why white women are seen as valuable and delicate in contrast to Black women. For whites of the time, Truth's ability to birth 13 children and survive the holocaust of her people was not worthy enough to have her seen or respected as a woman or a full human. The critical consciousness of white men and women was impeded by their limited capacity, resulting from their voluntary participation in the white supremacy system and these ideals subsist today. Though Truth gave her speech in the 1800s, she aimed to disrupt the status quo and make the invisible visible. Her speech at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention was radical and another example of Black women using the Spirit and practicing motherhood all the while holding and using their codes, such as the Spirit, speech, and the arts to help society get whole.

Hill-Collins (1991) argues that we must do the work to recover the stories of everyday Black women, advocating that we should work to create "belief in Black women's activism as mothers, teachers, and Black community leaders" (p. 23). The above section outlined my conceptual framework including my understanding of womanism, spirit, and motherhood, as well as an example of how several Black women figures used their codes to fight for Black freedom. Each term is undoubtedly connected to our Africanity and may potentially weave a web amongst

one another that solidly cocoons Black children, allowing them to flourish. These concepts helped me frame this dissertation and consider how the stories of the three Black women I interviewed may support other Black women teachers as they pursue wellness for themselves and liberation from all forms of oppression. While this research recognizes that every role has a counternarrative and did not impose any of the above concepts on the three Black women teachers involved in this study, I did ask if they were exercising these concepts, how were their wellness practices influenced. The next section considers wellness and unwellness in the lives of historical activist Black women teachers. I end the section with literature that has helped me frame my understanding of wellness. Lastly, the chapter ends with pertinent research on Black teacher attrition and retention.

Offering: Activist Black Women and (Un)Wellness Historically

The experiences of Black women teachers and their dedication to Black racial uplift and student success have been written about by authors such as Ramsey (2008), who focused on the experiences of Black women educators from segregation through desegregation in Nashville, Tennessee, Casey (1993), a white oral historian, used life histories to tell the stories of two Black women educators involved in political action, and Ladson Billings (1994) discussed exemplar Black women teachers who used culturally responsive pedagogy. I have found few studies which consider Black women educators practicing wellness as a form of activism. Most literature on Black women teachers historically focuses on the sacrifices teachers make and the struggles Black people and Black women have had to endure to ensure Black children had the most outstanding education possible. Anna Julia Cooper argued that we should look to our past for wisdom, to our present (within) to heal and organize ourselves, and lastly, we should look forward, and outward with hope for deliverance from suffering and bondage (Cooper, 1892, p.

27). The following section examines historical notions of wellness and unwellness practices exemplified through the lives of several Black women teachers over the past 150 years. Some of these women would call themselves activist, while others maintained they were “bridge leaders” (Robnett, 1996), or women who helped local communities connect their needs to the larger fight for justice during the Civil Rights Era.

Black women in the United States have battled racist tropes about their blackness, womaness, and other identities since the inception of this country. While the white establishment has used color to attempt to confine the futures of Black people, Black women have organized and resisted. From a Eurocentric standpoint, Black women’s utility has only gone as far as their labor. The following teachers exemplify what it means to use the educational profession to help their students and communities fight back against oppression while pursuing or maintaining their personal wellness practices.

Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson, who developed the Citizenship schools during the Civil Rights Movement, exemplify what it means to see Black women, their work as teachers, and their sacrifices as more than just teaching (Hall et al., 2010). While this dissertation hypothesizes that the work Black women do with and for students is a part of wellness activism, in that in fighting for Black students, Black teachers are also fighting for their own freedom and wellness, steadily committing to the uplift of the entire race, exhibiting self-determination, and social transformation which is some of the concepts Karenga (2005) mentions is an essential principle of African people. Reading about the life of Septima Clark, I was amazed by her commitment not only to her family but to her people. Charron (2009) shares an in-depth look at what it meant to be a Black teacher in the early part of the 20th century.

Clark came from an impoverished background. Her father had gained his freedom 30 years before she was born; therefore, she was raised in a home where education was not taken for granted. To situate Clark's upbringing, Charron (2009) offers the following quote from a formerly enslaved person who shared, "Once I was whipped because it was simply thought I had opened a book" (2009, p. 52). This gives readers a glimpse into the harsh realities of life and the inherent freedom that is interconnected with getting an education. Clark took her first teaching job at 18. She wanted to be a teacher because she valued serving as God's will and she wanted to take care of her parents who sacrificed their dignity at times to make sure their children received the best education possible. Johns Island was the closest place she could get a job because Charleston, her home, refused to hire Black teachers. Black schools received a tenth of what white schools received and Black teachers were paid a third of White teacher's salary (2009).

The educational inequities in South Carolina were vast and daunting. However, like Forten Grimké years before her, Clark wanted what was best for her children and saw beyond their impoverished living conditions. The two years Clark spent on the island were catalysts for her activism and life's work. Teaching in substandard conditions with over eighty children, Clark quickly realized that Blacks on the island had to understand that education is an investment. She went door to door talking with the people in the community, helping them read paperwork, and understanding their crops' value while seeing the people on John's Islands as folks with agency who could solve the problems they saw within their community with the right resources (Charron, 2009). She helped the parents become vested in their child's education while simultaneously assisting adults to gain an education in the free evening classes she provided.

After her two-year stint on the island, when Clark returned home, she was offered a job teaching at Avery, the Black day school where she graduated and in 1918, she joined the city-

wide effort of Blacks who wanted Black teachers to work in Black schools. This was an important experience for her. It introduced her to community activism and connected her with Black leaders of the past who were elected officials during Reconstruction and were forcibly ousted once Union soldiers left the South. Clark also joined the NAACP at this time, married, and became a mother and a widow. She taught at the state capitals prestigious school for Blacks allowing her to make friends with “Colored Club Women” of the time and giving her access to the Black Teacher Union. The experience she gained at Columbia nurtured her passion and eventually her zeal to participate in the fight for Civil Rights and motivate others to fight as well. Clark’s background prepared her to create the Citizenship Schools that taught Black people about their inalienable rights (Massie Phenix, 1985). She was fired for failing to renounce her membership in the NAACP and agreed with *Brown v. Board of Education* which was unheard of for many Blacks in the South. Her work at the Highlander Folk School centered on getting others involved in the fight to have equality in the school system. It was Clark who convinced her niece Bernice Johnson to teach on Johns Island.

Bernice Johnson was born in Charleston, South Carolina in 1914, but upon graduating from school she worked civil service positions in New York and Philadelphia (Russell, 2011). When she returned to Charleston in the 1940’s, she had a unique view on racism in the South because she had spent so much time away from Jim Crow (Massie Phenix, 1985). When her aunt asked her to join her in helping those in the community learn how to read so they could vote she initially stated, “I never been no teacher, and I’m not going to be a teacher. I’ll help in any way. I told you that up there at Highlander, that I would help you all, help in any way that I could, I would help a teacher with the school, but I ain’t no teacher” (Levine, 2004, p. 391). Johnson

eventually gave in and fell in love with the Spirit of the people on John's Island, which had changed drastically since Clark's time there in 1918.

One of the most important takeaways for me from Johnson's time on this island is when she first walked into a classroom to teach illiterate adults, most of whom were older than her.

According to Levine (2004), she said:

I told them that they ask me to teach this class. But, I'm not going to be the teacher, we gonna learn together. You gonna teach me some things and maybe there are a few things I might be able to teach you, but I don't consider myself a teacher. I just feel that I'm here to learn with you, you know, learn things together. (p. 391-392)

Bernice Johnson's quote sums up what I believe activist Black women teachers embody about teaching and pedagogy. Whether in a formal school setting or being thrust before a group of people who have come to hear you speak because they trust you have something to say, Black women's knowledge, experiences, and spirit allow them to make a way even when a situation seems impossible. Clark and Robinson had the Spirit and courage to respond to the needs of their community. Clark often shared that her motivation for working with Highlander stemmed from her time on John's island where the residents were not afforded the opportunity to receive an education that would free them and their families from share cropping (Payne et al., 2008). This is a part of BWT activism. Their stories implore us to harken back to the indomitable spirits before us who planted seeds, grew fruit, and harvested in new lands. A similar sentiment is evident in revisiting Anna Julia Cooper's life.

Anna Julia Cooper was an educator, orator, and author who spent her life educating Black children. She believed in their excellence and became an advocate for the rights of Black women and all oppressed people. Cooper was daring, willful, and "Committed to survival and wholeness

of entire people, male and female” (Walker, 2004). She left behind countless primary resources concerning her experiences as an educated Black woman. In her letter *The Humor of Teaching*, she discusses the biggest crisis facing Black teachers, stating:

Segregated teachers are largely book-fed. What is worse, they believe what is in the books. They race to summer schools in institutes, to lecture courses in evening classes to “keep up close” with their work and perhaps earn a much-needed promotion. All of which is most commendable and highly necessary... They read, mark, learn, but there is no time to “inwardly digest.” Besides, a white man doesn’t always mean all he says in a book, and hardly ever does all he suggests in a speech. A lecturer must sell his books, that is his bread and butter. He must get out a new edition of an old thought and so he says one thing today, another tomorrow. (2000, pp. 234–235)

Though written in the 1930s, her words as an esteemed principal and one of the few Black women doctorate holders exist as proof that Black women were theorizing and attempting to revolutionize teacher preparation, and her writing supported her activism. She recognized that unprepared teachers would likely turn away from the profession and ultimately harm the children they teach. Cooper’s records are interesting because very few Black women had the opportunity to publish their thoughts in widely read publications.

Charlotte Forten Grimké was the first Black woman to graduate from Salem University and was the first African American woman to leave the North to teach in the South (Berry & Gross, 2020; Levin, 2000). Leaving her privileged upbringing behind, in 1862, she started working on the Sea Islands in South Carolina. She found herself overwhelmed and unprepared for the task of teaching poor rural Black children who were on the cusp of freedom. Grimké’s story is necessary to the history of Black women and wellness in that she performed wellness by

journaling, noting in her diary that she prayed every day not only for strength to do the task before her but also prayed for her students and their families. While Grimké provides one example of how Black women have gone feetfirst into difficult situations for the benefit of their people, it also demonstrates how we can neglect ourselves in service. She did not consider that she would have little in common with those on the Sea Island and that her way of thinking might have been foreign to her students. She did not consider their culture. Her story acts as a cautionary tale in that Grimké left the Sea Islands after only two years because she was unwell. The stress and alienation of the position contributed to her falling sick, and she physically could no longer continue.

Reflecting upon the legacies of Septima Clark, Anna Julia Cooper and Charlotte Forten Grimké allowed me insight into the experiences of Black women teachers and the great sacrifices they made to teach Black children. I saw a trend in their writings, reflecting a group consciousness, which speaks to Southern states grossly underfunding Black schools and leaving Blacks to fend for themselves (Anderson, 1988; Charron, 2009). Black women teachers and Black communities bore the brunt of the burden in the fight to educate their youth. Lastly, it is valuable to note that their documents and stories speak to Black women teachers' understanding of teaching as more than rote memory and classroom management. They understood the teaching profession as spirit work (Dillard, 2016) that is directly tied to the survivance of Black America. The last example of a Black teacher activist and her wellness practices comes from a local context, Atlanta, Georgia, which is where my interviewees taught at some time during this dissertation. Her story serves as a backdrop and signpost for the histories of Black women teachers in Atlanta.

Oral History of Bazoline Usher

The Black Women Oral History Project, located at the Schlesinger Library on the campus of Harvard University, is a robust set of oral history interviews conducted under the direction of Letitia Woods Brown, one of the first Black women to earn their doctorate in History from Harvard. The study, conducted from 1976–1981, was funded after Woods noticed that the voices of African American women were insufficiently represented in research and oral history archives. Seventy-two African American women, primarily ages 70 and above, were interviewed. Many women had careers in education, business, politics, medicine, law, and the arts. These women were chosen out of hundreds of possible women because the project advisory committee believed each had made considerable contributions to American society. It is best to cast a wide net when making an oral history. The researcher's interests influence who participates and what is ultimately discussed. Some topics discussed in this project include families, careers, spiritual work, and how being Black and/or a woman influenced participant's life choices. The interviewer collected participants' life histories on audiotape and then gave them the transcript to ensure they agreed with what was recorded. In this collection I found an oral history interview with a Black woman teacher from Atlanta named Bazoline Usher.

Bazoline Usher rose through the ranks of Atlanta Schools during the early 1900s. The oral history, conducted in her living room in 1976, provides details on race relations in Atlanta Schools, teacher training and experiences, and knowledge concerning racist and sexist policies of the time. As the first Black woman Administrator in Atlanta Schools and the first Black woman principal of one of Atlanta's oldest Black high schools, Howard High, I was excited to review her transcript and search for themes that speak to the realities of what life was like for Black women teachers and Black Atlantans as a whole.

Usher was born in 1885, about an hour away from Covington, Georgia. She shares that race was always a pertinent part of her experience. She felt like Black people deserved the same rights and respect as whites and was the first Black to take the front elevator with the other politicians in Atlanta's City Hall when no other Black person held an office there. Usher was a 1906 graduate of Atlanta University (Usher, 1976). She was also a student of Du Bois. She went on to discuss how students of the AUC, who were vastly there to learn how to become teachers, reacted to the "debate" between Du Bois and the teachings of Booker T. Washington stating:

The students got far enough along to do that, to know, to realize there were two trains of thought among students, but very little was done about it. Very little was said about it. And we had no outstanding people who spoke out for any of it in fact, they didn't dare, they just took the words. Students at that time were rather passive, that's what I feel by looking back over it. The unrest began to grow afterwards. It just began to grow, and it grew in the students, a long time before it came right out. (p. 14)

These future Black teachers and leaders of Black communities were highly aware of issues such as segregation and lynchings but went along with what was happening because they felt they had no other choice. Further ahead, Usher shared if she wanted to shop or see a show at the Atlanta Fox Theater, she had to enter through the establishment's back door. She also notes that Black women could not try on clothing, specifically hats, at department stores, or white women would not buy them. This structural racism prevented Usher from standing up for her rights and taught Blacks as a whole that it was in their best interest to accept whatever was offered.

Lastly, Usher addresses the impact of policy on her life. Women were unallowed to marry if they wanted to remain in the teaching profession. Ms. Usher was a teacher for over 50

years. When asked if teaching took a toll on her personal life, she shares that she never married or had any of her own children because:

I was the oldest in my family. And I had gone to college and had learned a little something... trying to help them along, trying to get them where they could do something. I had to help my brother and sisters. I helped my brother through school. It didn't cost too much, but I went to work and did things like that... I was busy helping and then when I woke up to realizing anything, I was past 30. And after I was 30, why, I didn't come I just didn't see anybody that I felt... All the good men were taken. I just haven't seen anybody since I was 35 years old, and that's about the time when I had these responsibilities lifted off me..." (p. 22)

By revisiting our foremothers' experiences, we can better understand why practicing wellness must be an indispensable facet of a Black woman teacher's life. In the United States, Black women and their bodies have been used and pushed to the brink by a society that has not cared for Black women and by a medical community that does not believe in maintaining the integrity or dignity of Black women.

What Do BWT Stories Mean for Our Wellness

What does it mean for Black women to face oppression and subjugation on multiple levels yet maintain spirits that continuously seek retribution, wholeness, and wellness for themselves and their community? Bambara (1992) starts her fictional book *The Salt Eaters* with a healer asking the main character, a tired, overworked, and overlooked, Black woman who has had a nervous breakdown, "Are you sure sweetheart, that you want to be well" (p. 3)? While this question may seem comical, at first glance, in reality, Black women rarely receive the opportunity to stop and focus on their wellness. Black women have been used as medical guinea

pigs, abused like mules, and have had nearly anything and everything stolen from them, including their time, talent, and even their very cells in their DNA (Skloot, 2010). In undertaking this literature review, I felt it was important to foreground the historical underpinnings of Black women's wellness and, consequently, unwellness, discussing how Black women have historically sacrificed themselves for the good of others.

In the *Handbook of Black Studies* (Karenga & Asante, 2006), Delores P. Aldridge, a sociologist and arguably one of the first mothers of Black Studies programs in the South, outlines the barriers and challenges Black women faced as they attempted to enter academia. As the former president of the National Council for Black Studies, she argues that women, specifically Black women, have been traditionally overlooked in the education profession. This is not only true when it comes to academics, but during the Civil Rights movement and throughout the new millennium, women have had to fight to have their voices heard. Aldridge cites the “myths and distortions” (p. 52) around women's lives as the reasoning for the development of Women and Gender Studies Departments across the United States. The erasure and silencing of Black women and their labor across the education profession is damaging to the psyche of future Black women in that when they go to the archives to search for Black women's voices we are unfound.

Evans (2021) takes a critical look at the roots of Black women practicing wellness. Her research finds that Black women have historically practiced yoga and meditation, citing evidence that the Queen of Sheba and other African people historically practiced daily Sun Salutations. Evans uses the theory of regeneration by looking inward, back, and forward to understand how her personal experiences with trauma and how the community has dealt with stress and health in order to understand better how the next generation may practice wellness. Focusing on memoirs, she does thorough research on yoga as a way to align one's mind, body, and spirit amidst and in

the face of trauma and social upheaval. She shares the story of numerous Black women, including activist and educator Anna Julia Cooper. However, here I want to highlight her usage of Rosa Parks as an example of how Black women activists can use wellness practices to maintain their self-care and navigate life's pandemics without falling victim to the world's ills.

Parks' activism was motivated by her hatred of oppression, and though she notes that living under Jim Crow nearly killed Rosa Parks' spirit (Evans, 2021, p. 209), in her story, it is evident that it is more than just our outward experiences that motivate Black women to fight for their lives and the lives of their loved ones no matter the cost. Parks is considered a mother of the Civil Rights movement but she found it challenging to provide for her family after her involvement in the movement. Evans shares that Parks turned to yoga and believes that yoga and her, "grounding in church" (p. 213) may be one of the reasons she lived well into her 90s. In studying Black women teachers, we can become energized to help ourselves live.

Evans (2021) contends that to be well, Black women must recognize their connection to the cosmos, theorizing that our wellness is connected to our mindfulness, in that Black women must realize we are interconnected so that we may find the power situated in our past in order to manifest our present and project our futures. While oppression, or "intersectional antagonisms" (p. 270) as Evans calls racism, sexism, and the other isms which attempt to burden the human experience, are ever present we have to consider what have Black women done in the past to survive. Through examining their experiences, we can garner clues about how we can stay well in the present.

Evans offers yoga and meditation as ways by which Black women have coped with stress and trauma associated with physical, mental, emotional, and sexual abuse, arguing that yoga can help one move from feeling powerless to being empowered (p. 312). She notes, our wellness

starts with being audacious like Truth and naming ourselves. One path, out of many outlined in her text, to finding our wellness may look like practicing yoga in ways reflective of our African roots. She shares that “meditations, prayer, and Sun Salutations” (p.66) are seen in Kemeti Yoga, and through recovering these traditional ways of moving, thinking, and being we can practice wellness from a holistic point of view. At the close of Evans’ book, she advocates prioritizing your wellbeing first, saying, “self-care can sometimes be effective community care” (p. 388). Her work on Black women and yoga served as a seminal piece to me: her research helped me to conceptualize how to collect Black women’s stories and present them as a means to recover and uplift our power as Black women.

Selection From the Choir: Black Teachers and Research on Retention and Attrition

In 2017 there were around 3.2 million elementary and secondary education teachers in the U.S. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020) Black teachers as a whole make up around 7% of the total public school teaching profession (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Of that, 7 % an overwhelming amount of these Black teachers are women (NEA, 2015). Education is the number one profession where the majority of Blacks and women received an advanced degree (U.S. National Science Foundation, 2015). However, at the collegiate level education programs find themselves in a crisis. Persistent low enrollment along with the long storied teacher attrition problem in Urban schools across the United States (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, 2019; B. R. Evans & Leonard, 2013; Madkins, 2011) it is clear that something more must be done to support and retain Black teachers.

The most recent literature to address Black women teacher attrition rates comes from two Black women researchers, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017). Using the existing literature on the topic and national quantitative data on school staffing, they not only describe

why Black women leave the profession but give some suggestions concerning how policy might be used to support their sustained presence in today's schools. First, Thomas and Hammond analyzed prior research on teacher compensation, school characteristics, working conditions, and teacher educator programs. Next, they considered a school's characteristics stating that according to the literature, the majority of teachers shared that they would prefer to work in a school with wealthy white children. However, on that same token, the opposite was true of most Black teachers. Teachers also reported that they wanted to collaborate and work in a school community where they would not be forced to do the work of teaching in individual silos. Lastly, teacher preparation programs play a large role in a teacher's feeling of preparedness. Those who felt like their program did a poor job preparing them for the profession were more likely to leave the profession because teaching did not look like what they thought it would.

In all, they found several trends among Black teachers. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond defined the teachers as either movers, those who may change positions or schools but still teach, or leavers, those who leave the profession altogether. Their initial findings suggested that though there is a large number of Black students in the South, there is a relatively low number of Black teachers in the South to teach them. Policies like No Child Left Behind, which are meant to target low-performing schools, have affected the number of schools open in urban areas where schools have traditionally been underfunded and the unfortunate targets of school segregation. After Hurricane Katrina, nearly 7,000 teachers were fired in New Orleans (Buras, 2016). Many of those teachers did not return to the profession and were replaced with teachers who were younger and white. According to teachers, salary, educational preparation, and working conditions played the largest roles in influencing them to leave the profession. Administration and leadership were the number one reason Black teachers left their schools.

Educators must interact with the administration on a daily basis, and this dynamic of power may have a direct impact on how they perceive their school, job, and students. The authors also missed the opportunity to discuss if or how the race or gender of those in leadership contributes to their experiences. Policy can positively or negatively sway the opportunity that Black teachers have to get a job. Their research provided some background for me to question how race and gender intersect to influence the longevity of Black teachers and how these identities interact with their professional well-being. Baker et al. (2021) provides a more recent context about how race and gender may affect Black teachers' health and well-being and also provide data on these teachers' wellness practices.

Teaching in an urban K-12 setting can be challenging during the best of times. However, teaching during the Covid-19 crisis has been downright dreadful. In their 2021 quantitative piece, Baker et al. a mixed group of researchers who were members of The New Orleans Trauma-Informed School Learning Collaborative, considered how the pandemic impacted the New Orleans school district teachers. Their sample included 454 teachers, 81% were women, and 51% were Black during April and May of 2020. They wanted to document the immediate needs of the teachers in order to create a policy that would provide resources to support them in their new normal.

The study looked at the stressors and protective factors that teachers were experiencing, defining stressors as things that may cause illness mentally, physically, or emotionally. Protective factors included spending time with friends or using other coping strategies to combat the stressors experienced. They also gave teachers a questionnaire that included two open-ended qualitative questions asking about what has been difficult about their job and what has made their jobs easier during the pandemic. They found that all the teachers reported experiencing

more stress within their profession because of the pandemic. However, the majority of Black teachers specifically reported a major increase in workload, difficulties in taking care of their children while home, and paying bills. They were also more likely to respond that someone in their household had to drop out of school. Black teachers were more likely to experience the negative impacts of Covid, whether through personal hospitalization or the death of a family member. In contrast, white teachers reported more personal emotional stressors and stress concerning what their students may be experiencing at home. Lastly, Black women teachers were more likely to experience protective factors in combating the stress of the job and pandemic because they were able to make new friend groups and spend more time with family and friends.

Though this was a quantitative research study, the implications of this study to my research are considerable. It seems as if some of the wellness practices Black teachers use are womanist wellness ethics, including spending time with family, making new friends, and paying more attention to their personal wellness and connection to their spirit. I would be interested to see how the participants' spirituality influenced their beliefs and experiences, which is one point I plan to address in my own study. Next, I will consider how whiteness impacts one particular Black teacher's experiences and look at how she showed resiliency in the face of adversity in the educational profession.

Black women teachers are the focus of a recent study by three Black researchers. Hancock et al. (2020) considered how the issues of mental, curricular, and professional aggression influence their well-being and willingness to stay in the teaching profession. The subject of this qualitative study, Alicia, is an elementary school teacher who was in the top percent of her teacher preparation cohort. She looked forward to teaching Black students and was hired to teach 2nd grade in an elementary school with 90% Black students and 10% Latinx

students during her first year. 26 out of the 30 teachers were white, and the school's three principals were white. Though her students excelled, Alicia was an outcast and ignored by her colleagues. They said she was an overachiever because she went to the student's games on weekends and worked diligently to maintain a positive rapport with their parents and the community. Though she made such strides, the administration at the school failed to recognize her for her efforts. Her colleagues said she had too many "Black books" in her room and that she should include pictures of other races within the class and her team lead refused to let her teach Thanksgiving in a culturally responsive fashion.

As a first-year teacher, this left her feeling isolated and tempted to leave the field of education, but she cites support from the other teachers of color in the school, prayers, and a commitment to the excellence of Black children as her reasoning for staying in the educational profession. Her commitment to her students and teaching style directly correlates to what Ladson-Billings (1994) describes as an exemplary teacher. However, Alicia cites whiteness and becoming a new parent as one of the primary reasons she has taken a two-year hiatus from the field. She also expressed that white fragility prevented her from delivering a curriculum that would empower her students. The entire process of being in the majority Black school with the majority of adults being white caused her undue stress and sleepless nights. Citing Dixson and Dingus (2008), the authors argue that Black women teachers naturally come into the classroom with their "spirit." Black women teachers also understand teaching as holistic in method and an act of activism for the Black community. Teacher preparation programs do not have to give them this. They naturally mother and support Black students regarding emotional, sociocultural, and behavioral needs. Since Black women teachers see teaching in this fashion, it is undergirded by

an ethic of care. Teachers like Alicia must sacrifice teaching a harmful curriculum and professional pushback when they try to do what they know is right for Black students.

Racial aggression negatively affects Black teachers and students. It makes for an uncomfortable and stressful learning environment, especially when teachers are locked away in their classrooms for most of the day and immediately encounter white fragility in their interactions with other adults in the building. The authors also argue that Black teachers in these settings experience racial taxation where they must repeatedly monitor themselves to make sure they are presenting themselves as racially acceptable. This exhausting practice is based on white politics of respectability. The intersections of race, class, and whiteness contribute to Black women leaving the profession of education before their white counterparts. Hancock et al. provide several possible interventions to eliminate the stress and pressures on Black women teachers.

The findings and implications of this article include that schools need to hire more Black teachers, and education prep programs should focus on recruiting more Black people to the profession. The curriculum is whitewashed and draped in white supremacy. Black women teachers do not want to lie to their students, and having to teach such a curriculum negatively affects their mental health and feeling of spiritual well-being. By providing more Black women teacher mentors for new teachers, we may be able to intervene and cancel out teacher attrition amongst Black teachers altogether. A powerful takeaway from this article is that Alicia incorporated the scholarly discourse of Black Feminist Theory, as read in Dillard (2016), to remain strong in this vast overarching system of white supremacy.

Dillard (2016) performed a case study of a Black woman teacher from the Southern portion of the United States. This study builds on her previous work concerning an Endarkened

Feminist Epistemology (Dillard, 2000), which not only considers race, class, and gender but also considers the historical roots of African and African American women. Her framework includes Black women's oppression and ways by which they have resisted, arguing that the work of Black women teachers is spiritual and sacred in nature (hooks, 2019; Wade-Gayles, 2002). This epistemology also removes the researcher as someone looking to solve a problem and places her in conjunction with participants as equals who are doing responsible research to bring about to their communities. She questions how this epistemology interacts with the voices of African women to shape how spirituality is discussed transnationally. Dillard also explores if conversations around spirit are being connected to research and teaching. Lastly, she questions how dialogue between teachers, specifically African women, and African American women, might influence ideas of Black womanhood and identity across the African Diaspora.

Using a study abroad trip to Ghana with preservice teachers from the United States to gather data, Dillard conducts a case study using student applications, journal reflections, and class discussions to understand ways students practice the following: researching, revisioning, recognizing, representing, and reclaiming. These terms are connected to African American people recovering pieces of their heritage and learning that Africa is vastly more different than the ways it is presented in Western media. To collect her data, Dillard specifically uses the experiences of Jaqueline, a 21-year-old in the last year of her teacher ed program who hopes to become an elementary school teacher. The study abroad group visits a school/orphanage, the route that enslaved Africans traveled to the coast of Ghana, and the slave dungeons in Elmina. The author provides vignettes from Jaqueline that reflect her growth during these experiences and speak to her spiritual journey of remembering her culture as it was lost during the trans-

Atlantic slave trade. In recovering our heritage and the memories associated with it, our epistemologies shift.

Dillard found that through the process of remembering, Jaqueline was able to combat negative racial stereotypes she had once internalized and consequently create a new empowered identity for herself, an identity that was steeped in her African roots. It is vital for Black women teachers and Black students to experience Africa beyond the mistruths they have been told in the United States. Exposing more Black teachers to this opportunity may support them in developing positive self-identity. As King (2018) argues, cultural heritage is an integral part of helping Black people feel whole. We need to provide authentic ways for Black educators to learn about their heritage so that they can give students the same opportunities. Lastly, this article provided an example of the power of narrative. Through storytelling, Jaqueline presented her evolution physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Jaqueline's story and Dillard's presentation of it, leave me inherently optimistic about choosing the methodology of oral history for my own work.

Chapter Two Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter examined the following concepts: pandemics, womanism, wellness, and research on historical BWT activist. While several theories including Black Feminist Thought and Africana Womanism influenced this work, womanism served as a grounding framework for this dissertation. The literature also explored ways Black women teachers of the past used the Spirit and may have practiced motherhood as a way of taking care their community and the Black race. The last section of the literature review outlined pertinent research on BWT attrition and retention.

The next chapter summarizes the researchers' positionality, views on epistemology, and is followed by the history and role of the methodology framing this study. The proposed methods

for the study, including the setting, participant sampling, recruitment process, and the data collection and methods used to analyze the data are shared as well. Lastly, ethical considerations are addressed.

3 METHODOLOGY

Introduction to The Message

Schwandt, (2000) contends that methodology is “a way of acting, thinking and speaking in research, and a middle ground between discussions of method and issues of philosophy of social sciences” (pp. 193). As I framed this study I considered the role my chosen methodology, oral history, would play in doing this research. Schwandt (2007) states that methodology “involves analysis of the assumptions, principles, and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry (that, in turn, governs the use of particular methods” (p. 193). While I am primarily using womanism (Africana) as my theoretical framework, focusing on wellness, spirit, and motherhood to understand how activist Black women teachers maintain their practices while teaching during life’s pandemics I also had to consider how my methodology would interact with my framework.

This chapter situates the framework that informed this study including further insight into researcher positionality, the setting, participants, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations. This research used qualitative inquiry and oral history though I recognize that oral history is primarily used in the historical field to tell an individual or group's story verbatim. Three Black women teachers gave consent for their interviews to be archived in the Georgia State University Library repository and made available to the public as a primary source of data on the experiences of Black women teachers in Atlanta.

This study is intended to lend primary source data on how self-ascribed Black women teacher activists practice wellness while navigating the educational profession amid life’s pandemics. Qualitative inquiry, oral history, artifacts, and photovoice are used to investigate the question which guided this study.

Study Purpose and Research Framework

This section addresses the research design and theoretical framework employed in this study. The study is intended to lend primary source data on how three self-ascribed Black women teacher activists practiced wellness while navigating the educational profession amid life's pandemics. Qualitative inquiry, oral history, artifacts, and photovoice are used to investigate the question which guided this study.

The research question guiding this study is:

- 1) How do three self-identified activist Black women teachers resist the multiple forms of oppression and marginalization they face in the U.S. as they navigate their educational and professional journeys?

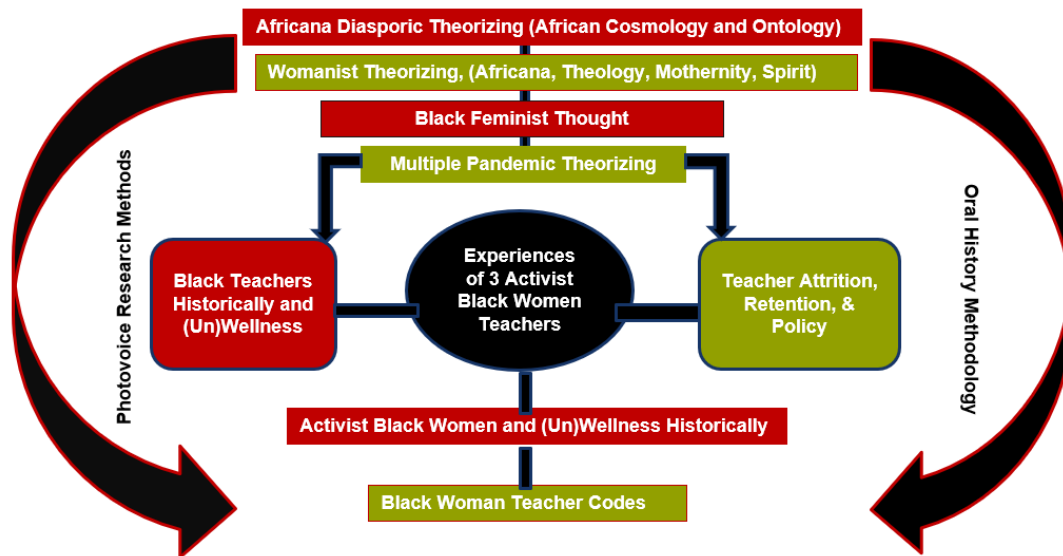


Figure 1. Purpose, Research Design, and Theoretical Frameworks

Epistemology, Theoretical Perspectives, and Frames

Epistemology is the study of how we know what we know (Glesne, 2016). My understanding of the nature of knowledge influences everything in my research, from my theory to my choice to use oral history and qualitative methods. Epistemologically, this research is informed by womanist ethics and an African-centered episteme—critical in nature. Seminal scholar and significant proponent of Afrocentricity in theory and action, Molefi Asante describes Afrocentricity as “a perspective that involves locating students within the context of their own cultural references so that they can relate socially and psychologically to other cultural perspectives” (1991, p. 171). In this paradigm, “everything [is] curriculum” and when doing research with people of African descent we must query how the world colors our experiences (Asante, 2017). An Afrocentric paradigm highlights the experiences of Afro-Diasporic people as players instead of people with no agency who are only victims.

Afrocentricity argues that the West is not the center of the world, and that the current model of language, culture, and research which focuses on the white, male, bourgeois and neglects women or those who do not match the correct class or income status, is limiting and Eurocentric (Asante, 1990; Asante, 1988, 2011; King & Mitchell, 1995; King & Swartz, 2015; Mazama, 2001; Thiong’o, 1993). Afrocentricity does not mean a rejection of other cultures but is an act of recognizing and embracing the African world view as the foundation for people of African descent. The pillars of Afrocentricity include researchers using Africa as a valid point of reference for knowledge and using African values to examine data in an effort to make the biased racial theories overlooked in many Western methodologies visible (Asante, 1998).

My research is grounded in Afrocentric cosmology and ontology. Understanding how these foundational views influence how I enact with my methodology and consequently,

choosing my methods is integral. Before detailing what this means, it is essential to recognize that Africa is a continent of varied cultures and experiences. I am not saying there is only one African way, but there are many shared or common ways of understanding reality and thinking about the world that exists across the continent. According to Nkulu-N'Sengha, African philosophical roots stem from oral traditions that storytellers and healers have passed down through myths; however, the earliest written information is from Kemet, dating back from the 12th Dynasty to the 12th century B.C.E. (Asante, & Mazama, 2005). Within an African epistemology, knowledge is derived from understanding how things interact in nature: “one does not know in isolation from the object to be known” (Etta & Offiong, 2019, p. 295). This understanding is deeply connected to an African ontology. Knowledge flows in a hierarchy from the highest being (the Creator) to the lowest force, which includes elements like plants and minerals.

Before education existed in Africa, there was the Spirit. According to Asante (2000), in Kemet, the ancient name for Egypt, the people used hieroglyphs to tell the story of the forming of Earth and the cosmos. Egyptians saw life as a never-ending cycle of life, death, and rebirth, represented by the scarab. Their society was based upon respect and reverence for the Gods and a belief in the Creator's Oneness. They held that everything is connected to everything on a foundational level, so one should always do right (Asante, 2000).

An African centered episteme uplifts Afrocentricity (Asante., 2014; 1988; King & Swartz, 2015), by which one may gain knowledge from the supernatural, such as teachers going to church and praying to God to help their students and community (Ladson-Billing, 1994). Ancestors also provide support and expertise. Learning can be garnered from natural or cognitive modes. The two cognitive methods include intuition, which in this sense means listening to one's

heart, and reasoning, which happens through an intellectual and logical human process (Asante & Mazama, 2005). An African epistemology is based on meticulous inspection of natural occurrences and critical thought to assess phenomena analytically. This is the way Africans come to understand reality. When this understanding of reality is framed within an African ontology that rests on the interconnectedness of everything, it produces an epistemology that reflects a caring, holistic stance that considers knowledge as valuable if it contributes to humanity. This research centers the experiences of activist Black women teachers. My epistemological understanding of the world needed a methodology that would assist me in doing research with Black women in an effort to recover their knowledge before it is lost to us forever. The philosophy of oral history aligns with research that can be open ended and people centered.

Positionality

Peshkin (1988) maintains that our subjectivities are “not a badge of honor.” (p. 17) Anytime we do research, the things that make us who we are such as race, class, and experiences influences why we do research, how we do research, and our interpretations of the data. While collecting data for an ethnographic study, Peshkin found himself identifying with and privileging the experiences of some more than others. His experiences with examining himself as he examined his data brought him to the conclusion that our subjectivities are not limited to one section or chapter of our research. My subjectivities also influenced what I sought to learn from the three BWTs in this study, and while I am specifically speaking to my experiences here, they influenced each chapter and page of my research.

Understanding the experiences of Black women teachers is personal for me. As a Black woman teacher who has experienced racism, sexism, and the harmful effects of white supremacy all within the educational profession, I find it imperative to recognize that my experience and the

experiences of other Black women teachers of my time are not new. In a fit of dysconscious racism (King, 1991), I went along with whatever was offered to me as a teacher. As Woodson says, “If you make a man think that he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door. He will go without being told; and if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one” (1933, pp. 84–85). My past allows me to consider not only how did I get free, but makes me question how do WE get free. Just as the prelude of this dissertation hearkens the consequences of ignoring someone else’s suffering and believing that we are safe from harm, the system will one day come to objectify another group of people. I believe that transformation and true power lies in exploring the ways Black women can and do resist.

My research centers on Afrocentricity, womanism, and the three women’s perspectives on their experiences in the public education system. I am an Atlanta native and was born in the Vine City neighborhood under the shadow of downtown. I grew up in one of Atlanta’s many housing projects and was bused to another neighborhood to receive an education because my local schools did not have an adequate program to meet my needs as a student.

I am dedicated to teaching Black children about their excellence. Since my graduation from the Urban Accelerated Certification Master’s (UACM) program in 2016, I have worked as an elementary school teacher across the metro region. As a first-year teacher at Venetian Hills Elementary, my school was closed, and I was forced to reapply with Atlanta Public Schools. This process helped me gain first-hand knowledge of the policies behind the day-to-day act of teaching. I saw myself in my students; they would have to ride a bus to a new school, similar to my own experience as a child. The rich history of the historically Black Venetian Hills neighborhood, and the intrinsic value residents placed on this institution was wholly ignored. I am where I am today because I had culturally responsive teachers who held me to high

expectations. I became a teacher because I wanted to be an advocate for Black children from underfunded neighborhoods, and I spent the next year teaching 3rd grade in Atlanta with the realization that yes, teachers make a difference, but we also need individuals who care about the health and wellbeing of Black students to influence the laws and policies that impact the lives of Black students.

My research interest also convenes around the experiences of Black women teachers who teach in urban settings because we have an attrition issue in education, and the next generation of Black boys and girls will suffer if we do not work collectively to keep Black teachers in the classroom. The school district struggled to find teachers who wanted to teach at “high needs” schools and offered signing bonuses to those who would commit to the task. Teaching in an urban setting was easy, but dealing with the adults in the school was often a challenge for me. My teacher preparation program did not prepare me for the politics of the teaching position. While I felt empowered to make a difference in the lives of Black children, I was also bullied and asked if I was “crazy or stupid” by my school’s principal during my first year of teaching. I began to question if the profession was something I could be successful in and wanted to quit my job, but I did not, because of my students. Every day we step into an urban classroom we can be change agents in the life of a child.

Black students should know they have agency and feel allowed to use this agency to learn about their past to create a more promising future. As a teacher, I tried to swallow my issues with administration and engaged my students in the action research process, challenging them to become change agents. Students need opportunities to practice critical thinking and question the world around them while still having the imagination to create something better. In a world that often tells Black children no and in a system that tries at every turn to limit Black people, I

wanted to remind my students that they have agency and can be their own heroes, hoping they would never feel the loneliness and depression I felt in my chosen career. Black students are conscious, capable, and bright. They deserve teachers who are well and an educational system that nurtures their genius. While this section specifically spoke to my positionality and subjectivities, these topics are dispersed throughout this dissertation and evident in everything from the research question to the presentation of the data.

Oral History

Janesick defines oral history as “the collection of stories and reminiscences of those persons who have firsthand knowledge of any number of experiences” (2020, p. 3). The purpose of oral history is to “emphasize participant’s perspectives” and often “involves multiple open-ended interview sessions with each participant” (Leavy, 2011, p. 4). In an African context, griots and other venerated individuals within specific tribes and cultural traditions have used oral traditions to share morals or values and pass down traditions across multiple generations. Though the African goal of oral tradition differs from the traditional goal of the Western world’s take on oral history, oral histories conducted by other Black women scholars suggest that the method can be used to share the power that lies in defining oneself for oneself while situating how one’s being impacts their community (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Etter-Lewis, 1993). Janesick (2020) adds that oral histories assist those who have been othered (Lorde, 2007) because in telling their stories they help the generations who come after them. We need a record of the values and practices of Black women teacher activists added to the historical record so future Black women can have the proverbial codes to our wellness as teachers.

Another objective of oral history is to recover firsthand accounts particular to an experience or phenomenon through interviewing those who have the memory to bear witness

(Ritchie, 2014). The interviewer engages the interviewee through dialogue and transcribes their interviews later. During the depression in the South, Black historians from various colleges began interviewing descendants and formerly enslaved people to preserve their experience of this historical event in the 1930s (Ritchie, 2014). Many of them did not have the technology to record the interviews, so we had to rely on their notes in place of a transcript. In 1987 the International Oral History foundation was established so oral historians could meet biannually and discuss methods they use in the field (2014). Oral history has been used to recover deleted archival records of conflicts in Africa and Asia, where conquerors changed history books to reflect their supremacy (2014). A sociologist may use this methodology to connect micro-level experiences to more significant phenomena which have taken place within a nation or culture. By using oral history, one can record the experiences of those who have been marginalized, oppressed, and possibly deleted.

Over the past 60 years, feminist researchers have used oral history as a methodology to document and present the lived experiences of women. Feminist researchers assume that women are knowledgeable about the world, but their knowledge has been repressed and ignored by male-dominated societies in the West (Leavy, 2011). When doing this type of research, it is vital to build a rapport with the interviewee during the research process. The outcomes should reflect a narrative that shows an intense collaboration between the researcher and the researched. To this end, oral history can be used from an activist standpoint to share the knowledge of women who may otherwise be overlooked and disregarded.

Ontologically, oral history assumes that research is a process, and through interviews, social knowledge is created (Leavy, 2011). According to Bolderston, "Interviews are ways of listening to and gaining an understanding of people's stories" (2012, p. 68). Oral history can

happen in several ways from this approach. It is fluid, and the procedure may change as the researchers and participants participate in this iterative process (Leavy, 2011). Leavy (2011) proclaims that because of its fluid nature, oral history may have goals that target “exploration, description, explanation, theory building, or social action” (p. 9). This methodology allows for open-ended interviews and sees the researcher and participants as collaborators from an epistemological standpoint. Both parties are essential to the data collection process, and interviews may change or go off-script in this process of what Frisch (1990) calls “shared authority.” This, of course, opens the door for concerns around authorship; again, this is navigated upfront by the researcher and participant.

As evidenced in Pushkin (1988) an interviewer’s subjectivities and ideologies can shape how oral history is presented. It is essential for the oral historian to journal their way through the process of their research and question how their experiences influence which details of a story they want to probe deeply and which topics they completely ignore. While interview questions or prompts serve as guides to support the narrator or storyteller ultimately they are trusting the listener with their stories. Memory and how we make meaning of our past must be addressed by oral historians.

Memory

Memory is an essential part of this methodology, and it is important for oral historians to consider not only the story they are hearing but also if their retelling of the story changes the meaning the teller originally held for their story. Fournillier (2016) addresses the act of remembering and collective memory, suggesting that there are ethical implications involved in telling stories. She questions if the listener has the right to retell the story in the ways they remember it and if the frames the researcher or listener uses would be applied by the teller if they

were writing up their own stories. Using data from her dissertation to create the chapter, Fournillier reviews her evolution as a researcher as one of the reasons she is revisiting the life histories she had collected several years prior. Ultimately, she cites that there is a responsibility tied to handling and curating her informant's stories because what she puts on paper becomes a "representation" of their "experiences" and "identity" (p. 498). I also considered how my memory of the telling of the oral histories collected would paint my participants and I struggled to find a way to let the women in this dissertation shine when so much of their remembering was tied to their relations with others. I questioned if it was right to tell the stories of childhood nicknames when they were associated with what some may see as neglectful behavior on behalf of their loved ones. Ultimately, I also followed Fournillier's lead and made sure to check my telling of the oral histories with each BWT. While I now house the stories told to me, I do not own them, and I question if as time passes I will also revisit and retell to others what has been told to me.

A significant critique of this methodology is the accuracy of human memories; therefore, researchers need to consider their teller's memories about what is being shared. Positivist researchers believe that oral histories may be skewed through the act of storytelling, making our memories unreliable at best (Thomson, 2011). Oral history in motion is a look at the past, or memory, and the present which is where we make meaning of the past. While researchers can probe further or push back for further information from tellers during the interview process it is a fine line between one telling someone what they remember and the researcher framing the teller to remember an experience in accordance to their own frames. When conducting the oral histories for this dissertation I paid special attention to the mood, details, and purpose of why the narrator might tell a story a certain way and made notes in a

separate research journal. Asking participants to recall memories they may have buried because they were too painful also comes with risks. To combat this issue, I used the shared authority approach (Thomson et al., 1994). Shared authority takes a collective approach to doing an oral history. I asked my interviewees to talk about photographs, share lesson plans, and teach me an invocation to help them work through their memories as well as use their different senses to recall and interpret their memories. Though a participant's word is most valuable in this methodology, it can be supported by documents or official records like newspapers, report cards, or diaries. I was unable to recover written historical documents from my participants. However, I have paid special attention to presenting their words verbatim where possible. I want their stories archived in a place where future investigators can access the information and use it to further knowledge.

When writing up the research, the oral historian should be aware of how they frame the words participants have shared with them during interviews. One of the most significant necessities of this methodology, as with most qualitative methodologies, is transparency. Participants need to know precisely how the research was done from start to finish (Leavy, 2011). Harding (1992) argues that we must present a "strong objectivity," which in turn constitutes strong reflexivity. Values and statements are made in the research purpose statement and define the issue. Researchers need to ensure that participants have access to this information. They also need to make sure everyone in the process maintains the same understanding. The participant's voice matters, and researchers must be sure they are not privileging themselves in any way. I kept a journal to document when, where, and how I interacted with the women throughout the research process. I used memos (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) throughout the interviewing process to bring awareness concerning my thoughts so that I would

not privilege myself when I went back to transcribe the interviews and review the data. In all, this methodology is used to document how people have perceived events in their lives.

Oral history as a method provided me with direct knowledge about the spiritual and wellness practices of BWT, specifically in the historical event we find ourselves in (Covid-19) and gave insight into how we have survived and will continue to survive the pandemics that life offers us as Black women. Being a Black woman in America is hard, and I wanted to discover what strategies the women used to resist the racist, sexist, ableist society we live in, to not only document the ways these powerful teachers resist but also provide new teachers with the codes about possible ways to navigate the educational field. Also, a womanist researcher, I wanted to illuminate how one's spirit and spiritual practices connect to one's health and well-being. In an African sense, our spirits operate in the "was, are, and will be" (Nunley, 2020). During our initial interview, I questioned how participants experienced and potentially practiced spirituality in the midst of racial injustices played out in the media, damaging curriculum materials, and the everyday issues that come with living. In my literature review, I noticed that the role wellness plays in influencing Black women teachers needed much development.

Photovoice

While documenting the experiences of Black women teachers through a qualitative story, it is imperative to also include artifacts and photographs produced explicitly by the participants so their lives can be seen as multidimensional and varied as Black women are not a monolith. Wang and Burris (1997) describe the value of using photovoice as a method to promote dialogue, allow participants to show what matters to them, and reach policymakers. The authors developed the concept of photovoice by taking Freire's practices of using the visual image with participants in the Favella's a step further by allowing community members to decide which images are most

valuable to their experience. Photovoice is seen as a type of participatory research that enables the participant to share their expertise instead of having an outside researcher tell them what they should think is necessary. This method is particularly useful when working with marginalized groups, as it allows researchers to see the world through their participant's lens, literally.

Another great thing about this method is that it allows researchers to see experiences and events that they otherwise might not be privy to. Photovoice can allow participants to speak about others in their group who may not be actual participants. This may be helpful if a researcher is trying to understand the happenings of a group or community. Finally, it can help a researcher see where a community thrives just as much as it can describe what it lacks. Wang and Burris used this methodology to show what a community in China needed in reference to public health. The researchers trained women in the community to use the cameras, facilitated group discussions for the community to discuss the images, and offered feedback to one another on the images created. The authors suggest that when using this, participants need to “select photographs that most accurately assess the needs of the community, contextualize, and codify the photographs” (1997, p. 380). From their research, they were able to share the burdens that girls and women face in small towns in China, specifically in Yunnan, where the girls were pictured doing chores in the middle of the day instead of going to school, and older women had to walk miles to fetch clean water. Photovoice can allow participants to think critically about their experiences and surroundings, so I want to incorporate it into my study.

Photovoice is seen as a type of participatory research that allows the participant to share their expertise instead of having an outside researcher tell them what they should think is important. Wang and Burris (1997) describe the value of using photovoice as a method to promote dialogue. Banks (Banks, 2001) reminds researchers to continuously question why

specific photographs are chosen and challenges researchers to be aware of if they choose photographs because they already support some hypothesis, they have brought with them before conducting the research. I planned to use the photos as both an artifact and a talking point during the interviews with participants. Photovoice allows participants to show what matters to them. Lastly, Photovoice will enable researchers to see experiences and events that they otherwise might not be privy to. Photovoice can allow participants to speak about others in their group who may not be actual participants. This is helpful in that oral history takes time, and I can only interview so many people, photovoice helped me see other teachers or activities my participants feel are important to their spirits and their survival. Photovoice can encourage participants to think critically about their experiences and surroundings, adding a more nuanced context to their stories. These types of methods are particularly useful when working with marginalized groups, as it allows researchers to literally see the world from their participants lens.

By collecting data using oral history interview methods, I hope to add to the existing research on Black women teachers. I am also combining a historical record of the experiences of Black women teachers during past pandemics and the present one we find ourselves in today. My chosen methods allow me to “return my research to the people” (King, 2017), as their testimonies were not changed by me and should not be manipulated by any future researchers who come upon this study. Just as if we were in a court of law, my participants’ responses will stand as a historical record, which is why I described it as testifying which refers to the ways Black people in church stand up during services and tell how good God has been to them. Smitherman (1986) defines testifyin’ as a “concept referring to a ritualized form of Black communication in which the speaker gives verbal witness to the efficacy, truth, and power of some experience in which all Blacks have shared” (p. 58). Photographs and artifacts also hold

space for the BWT to be creative and express themselves outside of what is presented in the interview. We gain different understandings when reflecting upon tellers using multiple modes.

I used oral history as my driving methodology because Black women have traditionally been silenced from the archives. Oral history and its privileging of memory as truth is constantly questioned within academia, however as womanist theologian Katie Cannon argued even the anecdotal evidence of Black women is useful if we are to counteract the “structured amnesia” of academia and consequently research itself (Cannon, 2006). Prior research on Black women has mentioned “giving voice” to the participant, however as a womanist I insist that I cannot give Black women something that they already have. The purpose of using oral history and photovoice for this research was to democratize the research process and emphasize the experiences of Black women. Black women are capable, and with these thoughts I to create a flyer that would attract Black women to tell their stories.

Setting and Sample

Oral history allowed me to use my prior knowledge to design this study. I am a teacher, and I also substituted at several different schools; therefore, I used a sample of convenience to find three interviewees. Robinson (2014) suggests “defining the sample universe as demographically and geographically local and thus restricting generalization to that local level” (p. 32). I created a flyer (Appendix A) and shared it with my network of colleagues in November of 2022. I thought I would quickly find participants for my study, but I did not. In December of 2022 I made an Instagram and Twitter account (BWTCodesAtl) and shared my flyer across social media, using #blackwomen #teachers #activist as some of the code words to attract potential participants. I still did not receive responses from interested participants. Finally, towards the end of January a teacher contacted me and noted a friend of mine had shared my

flyer and that she would like to share her story with me. Then, another friend reached out to me and shared that she had the perfect potential participant for this research. I talked to each woman on the phone and listened in both cases for over ten minutes while they described their lives and why they wanted to participate in this study. Both teachers identified as Black women activists and considered themselves knowledgeable about Black history and integrated this knowledge into their teaching. Both teachers taught in Dekalb County and had taught for at least 15 years. This was important to me because I wanted to ensure that I was recruiting teachers who were staying in the field and practicing wellness to help them stay in education. Before we got off the phone, I asked them if they were willing to discuss their feelings and experiences with wellness, motherhood, Covid-19, activism, and life's "pandemics." Both teachers agreed and I quickly sent over my informed consent they could review it and ask any questions before our meeting.

I found my third participant by chance in late February. She is a close friend who decided to participate because she felt like her story might help other teachers better navigate the education system. She has taught for over six years in Fulton and Atlanta Public Schools and unlike the other two teachers, she had never been interviewed for any type of research before. We planned to meet at the beginning of March to complete the interviews. All interviews took place in the participants' homes on a date of their choosing.

In Africanist and womanist tradition, I share the stories of each woman in accordance to their eldership. The three women were between the ages of 72 and 37. Two were born in the South and one was born in the Mid-West, with Southern origins. All women are college graduates. Two women have master's degrees. The first teacher, Ms. Deborah Davis, is an elder in the teaching field who started her teaching career over 4 decades ago in 1970. The second teacher, Tamara Ivy, started teaching in 1997 and has over 20 years of experience teaching in

public schools. The final teacher, SJ Educate, is a 37-year-old teacher with seven years of teaching experience exclusively in the metro Atlanta area. Furthermore, each teacher came from a different spiritual background. Ms. Davis identifies as a Muslim woman, Ms. Ivy is a Christian, and SJ Educate embraces a combination of African Traditional Religious practices in her spiritual life. Ms. Davis is a divorcee, Ms. Ivy has never been married, and SJ Educate is currently married. All of the teachers taught in the Atlanta area during the Covid-19 pandemic and are currently employed by a Metro Atlanta school district in various roles.

Table 1: Biographical Information for Three Black Women Teachers

<i>Name of Participants</i>	<i>Date and Place of Birth</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Teaching Experiences</i>	<i>Current Status</i>
<i>Deborah Davis</i>	December 18, 1951, Charleston, South Carolina	Early schooling in Harlem. 2 years of college in the 60's. BA in Education, Special Ed, Ga State University, 2000.	5 years at the University of the Nation of Islam. 14 years in high school Special Education.	Tutor in a metro Atlanta School District.
<i>Tamara Ivy (Tam)</i>	June 30, (withheld), Detroit, Michigan	Early schooling in Detroit Catholic School. BS in Secondary Education, Central Michigan University. Studies, 1997. Masters in human resources, CMU. Masters in Reading, Towson University, 2008.	4 years in middle school Social Studies. 16 years of high school History.	Teacher in a metro Atlanta School District.
<i>SJ Educate</i>	February 18, 1986, Shreveport, Louisiana	Early schooling in rural town in La. BA in Political Science, Sothern University 2010. M. Ed, Ga State University, 2017.	7 years in elementary education in an urban setting.	Substitute in a metro Atlanta School District.

I obtained informed consent from my participants before the beginning of our first interview together. They each signed the IRB reported Informed Consent. In the case of Ms. Davis, I read the form with her and answered any questions she had about the form in person. Usually, oral histories use the name of participants, but since my topic may be sensitive, I asked participants to choose a pseudonym. SJ Educate is the only participant who opted for a pseudonym. I also submitted my research proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Though I do not intend this project to cause physical or emotional stress, I wanted to supply a number for teachers to call if they feel this research process has motivated them to undertake self-harm. I also informed participants that they can refuse to take part in this research at any time and may withdraw any information they have contributed at any time. No one reached out to me about any issues from our conversations and I sincerely hope this process further empowered these Black women teachers to continue to share their stories and change the world.

Data Collection

I initially planned to do three interviews with each participant, but due to scheduling conflicts I ended up with only two oral history interviews per participant. Each interview was completed in-person. Before the interviews I asked them to bring any artifacts that speak to their activism and wellness to the meetings. I encouraged them to bring or email any of the following: curriculum/lessons, photographs/videos, notes, diaries, reflections, newspaper/web reports, or emails that shed light on their wellness practices and activism. Janesick (2014) discusses how researchers can use documents and digital sources to support the participants' stories and bolster the validity of what is being shared. I hoped these thoughtful artifacts would assist the participants in jogging their memory, which has been seen as one of the challenges or critiques of oral history.

Errante (2000) argues that though memory plays an essential role in oral history, memory is more than documents and moves beyond the practice of recalling facts and figures. Memory is imparted through the details by which the interviewer and interviewee negotiate through the story telling process of doing an oral history. Throughout the research period I found myself in constant dialogue with the participants. During the interviews I attempted to bracket my thoughts in my researcher's journal, but often found myself uncomfortable in trying to remain quiet while interviewing Black women because we often engage in storytelling practices, and it is difficult to tell a story to a completely silent listener. Through engaging the teller of the stories, they often came up with more details to support their story. There is much debate concerning the validity of human memory with scholars maintaining that time has a way of altering or corrupting what really happened from what we think happened. In this research the act of "re-membering" is just as important as memory itself. Scholars such as King (2018) and Dillard (2021) argue that through the process of returning and retrieving our history, we remember who we are and our role in the transmission of knowledge throughout the Africana Diaspora. Through the telling of one's story, the interviewee is simultaneously making meaning of their own experiences. Furthermore, I hope to aid the act of memory and remembering through the usage of participant provided artifacts.

Artifacts not only support the participants' stories but helped to guide me in our subsequent interviews. I was able to tailor questions specifically to their experiences and conceptions of wellness while teaching. During this interview process member was the most essential artifact I had in my arsenal. Participants did not provide me with any artifacts before the start of our interviews. I also completed each interview at the home of the participants. Before starting the recording, each participant spoke with me for anywhere between 20 minutes to one

hour before the official start of our interviews. This also allowed me to see pictures and mementos in their home and ask about them and their significance. I did not tell the participants that these mementos could be used as artifacts as I did not want to name what was significant to them to share. Womanist research centers on the use of the vernacular to tell a story just as much as the extraordinary. What may seem extraordinary in the lives of my participants to me, may seem commonplace to them and I wanted to practice an ethic of care in how I treated their home and spoke about their experiences.

I initially asked the participants to take do the photovoice activity, which was to provide three photographs with a written description of why they chose to share these photographs and how they speak to this wellness practices, spiritually, or activism before our second interview would take place. However, all of the participants completed this activity after our interviews had taken place. I asked participants to submit the photovoice data and include a short description of the following: who, what, when, where, and why they have decided to include this artifact. This written data further allowed them to share their experiences in their own words, which can be empowering as Charmaz (Charmaz, 2006) notes that sometimes power dynamics may enter an interview and influence how a participant responds. In interview one we focused on their childhood and upbringing. The second interview focused on their experiences as an adult and becoming a teacher, we also focused on the meaning that some of the experiences shared holds for participants.

Before the beginning of our second interview, I asked the participants to share an invocation with me. This act of invocation could have been a song, dance, prayer, poem, or other practice that speaks to their wellness and wellness practices. In an African sense, the invocation can be used to help the participant feel comfortable with me and put them in a role they are

familiar with, teaching, before I ask them questions about their life and experiences during the pandemic. I conducted two semi-structured interviews compiled of 6-8 questions that asked participants about their identities as Black women, teachers, and activists, what wellness means to them, their wellness practices, and the extent to which spirit, motherhood, and activism intersect as they navigate their teaching role and maintain their wellness. While the first interview mainly focused on biographical information the second interview is where we discussed motherhood as teacher activists, and how their spirituality, teaching, and activism overlap with one another as they navigate the educational field. Again, the interview questions were tailored to the participant based on what they shared during each interview.

I thought the participants would participate in a photovoice activity for the second interview. I had planned to use the photographs as both an artifact and a talking point during the second interview with the participants, assuming that the first interview has them thinking more about our topic and what they want to share. As stated earlier, photovoice allows participants to show what matters to them and allows researchers to see experiences and events that they otherwise might not be privy to. Photovoice can enable participants to speak about others in their group who may not be actual participants. However, I did not receive the 1-3 photographs/images (visual representations) until after all of my interviews were completed. I am unsure of if this was extra work or labor for the participants. I wanted them to share these images and subsequently use them to describe what it means to them to be a Black woman teacher activist during the pandemic.

I kept a journal throughout the research process to document when, where, and how I interacted with my participants. After each interview I took 5-10 minutes to journal and reflect on what was shared because I wanted to be sure that I checked my bias and did not privilege

what I thought over what they shared. I also used memos (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) throughout the interviewing process to be aware of what I was thinking and it helped me check that I was not privileging myself. I offered to share all transcripts with the participants and asked them to review what was shared and let me know if they would like to redact any of our conversation. I wanted the BWTs to ensure I represented what they shared correctly.

Assumptions

This study made assumptions about how Black women teacher activists navigate the educational system, proclaiming that racist, sexist, and oppressional structures exist and influence their experiences. This study also assumed that the Black women teachers interviewed would give truthful responses in interviews, invocations, and artifact sharing. Assumptions concerning blackness and its relationship to African values of education influencing the lives of Black women are made and influenced through my thoughts on Womanism (Africana), motherhood, and spirit. I assumed that the activist-minded teachers involved in the research have come into contact with motherhood, wellness, and life's pandemics.

Data Analysis

In oral history, data analysis is driven by the participant's words, as transcribed from the interview. Traditionally an oral history is curated by the researcher to tell the story of a participant. I am taking an approach similar to Delaney and Raftery (2021) who gave participants "outlines of the thematic areas to be explored through open-ended questions, and the ways in which interviews would be recorded, transcribed and used" (p. 36) before interviewing them because I want the participant's words to be used as testimonies to their experiences as activist Black women teachers navigating life's pandemics. I also wanted them to have time to think about what they wanted to say. Data analysis started before I conducted interviews. During each

phone call, email, or text message the participants and myself were making meaning together, trying to understand if their stories and the purpose of this research intersected and coincided as we moved forward in the research process. I completed my initial codes using In Vivo coding (Charmaz, 2006; Saldana, 2009), which is the process of using short phrases from the participants words, looking at encounters, experiences, and roles to code their transcripts.

During the first interview and in each subsequent interview, I made memos and wrote notes next to phrases about what I heard the participant share so that I could begin to create a timeline of the events that happened in their lives. This loose level of coding allowed me to ensure I was hearing what the interviewee shared in so many words since I had over eight hours of interviews to listen to and transcribe. I went back through on the same document and bracketed my thoughts in green against what they were sharing, but this also served as a loose, “code and category generating method” (Saldana, 2009, p. 157). After the first round of coding, I had over 700 codes across two interviews per participant. It took me nearly two weeks to fully transcribe and code each full interview. Feeling unsure of how to narrow these codes down I entered all of data from the interview transcripts into the NVivo software program. I then ran a data analysis on each interview and had NVivo auto code the interviews. This process allowed me to get a visual representation of what was talked about in each interview as the program created a color-coded schema based on the most frequently said words in each interview. I compared my codes to the codes generated in NVivo to see if there were any overlaps.

I also brought in the data from the Photovoice activity. As a note, I did not receive the Photovoice reflections from the last participant until the research period was over. However, I went back and amended my initial codes once I received her package. In analyzing the Photovoice activity I followed the method that Wang and Burris (1997) provided by asking how

did the participant describe the photograph, what did they say was happening, and why did they say they shared it. The answers to each question were taken directly from the words they shared when they sent the photographs. I put these words into NVivo as well and asked it to code each item. Between the interviews and Photovoice I found over 357 overlaps across the codes I created and the NVivo codes. Some of the codes did not provide much meaning in what the participant said or why they said it, for example codes such as school, girl, and students. I was still overwhelmed with the sheer number of codes, but I moved onto the second round of analysis.

During the second level of analysis, I reviewed the initial codes I had made and began creating subcategories. For my second round of coding, I did focused coding to compare what interviewees have shared in their individual interviews and Photovoice activities with what other interviewees shared on the same questions. I did this because I wanted to begin crystalizing (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2018) the experiences of the participants. At this level I found the following subcategories:

Table 2: Subcategories from Comparative Coding

Teaching	Wellness (practice)	Physical health	Religious Foundations
Mothering	Teaching to be well	The Arts	Spiritual Home
Taking Care of	Empowering Students	Eating	God
Job	Community	Financials	Rights

I also engaged in another round of memo writing, which I borrowed from the grounded theory approach, that allowed me to make a note of why I coded certain phrases in a certain way

(Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). I used my researcher journal and wrote time stamps with the participants initials and interview date to note how I felt the phrases from round one fit into the subcategories of round two. From this stage I began to do a third round of data analysis, further incorporating the artifacts and descriptions provided. I was attempting to filter the information further and determine, describe, and label the main categories of my research by looking for interconnections across the codes and data. This was a messy process and took several days of piecing phrases, subcategories, and potential categories before I connected the subcategories together and came up with the following categories for each corresponding column.

Black women’s labor, Motherity	Black women and activism	Black women and spirituality	Black women and wellness practices
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Table 3 Main Categories from 3rd Round of Coding

As I began writing the actual narratives that I would use to present the results of this research for Chapter Four of this dissertation I realized that it was best to use the participants words to speak to what each Black woman was experiencing. I created a chart to help me see the multiple rounds of coding and understand the connection between the themes that emerged from their words and the essential questions which fueled this research.

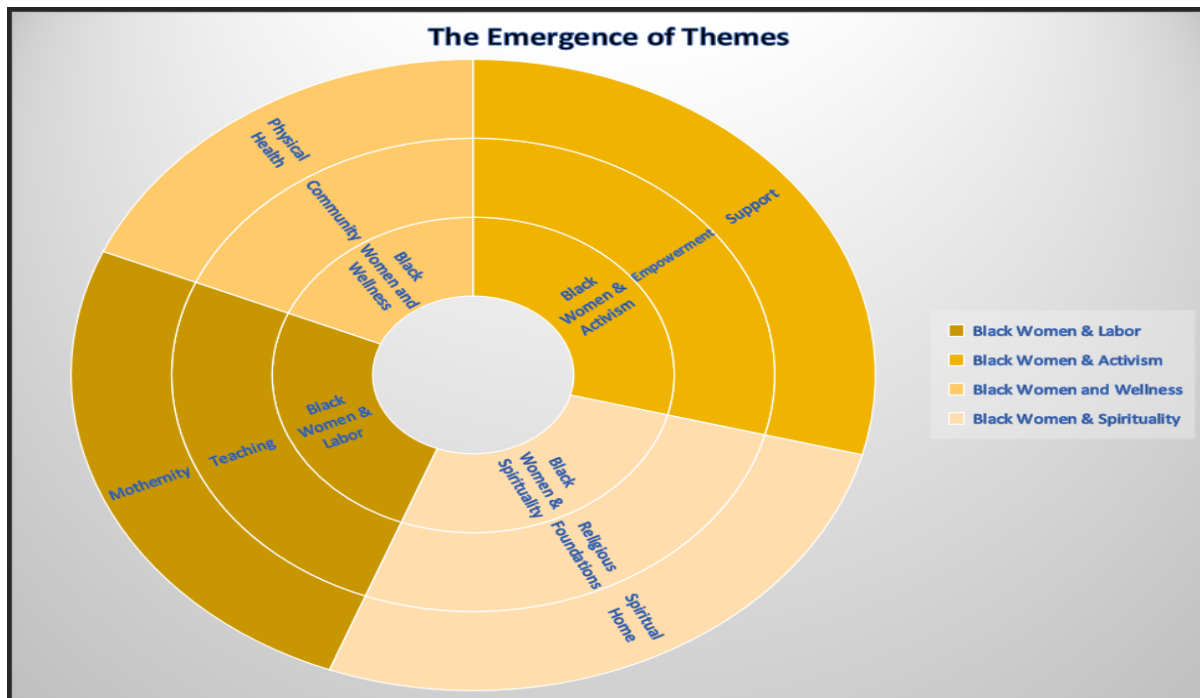


Figure 2. *The Emergence of Themes*

The emergence of themes seen in Chart 1, reflects how I thought about the major themes developed by crystalizing the data and the overall aims of this research which was to investigate and document how activist Black women teachers maintain their wellness while teaching. Now that I had a clearer vision of how the nearly 300 pages of data from interview transcripts, artifacts, and the photovoice data were interconnected I felt confident to begin crafting the narratives I would present in chapter four.

When writing up the research, the oral historian should be aware of how they frame the words participants have shared with them during interviews. One of the most significant necessities of this methodology, as with most qualitative methodologies, is transparency. Participants need to know precisely how the research was done from start to finish (Leavy, 2011). Oral histories should be presented verbatim as much as possible, and I plan to release the transcripts from our interviews to the Georgia State University Library. I want the words of the

Black women who participated in this project to serve as testimonies to the experiences of Black women teachers. Their words deserve to be archived in a place where other Black women can access the information and use it to further knowledge.

Limitations

My limitations included access to Black women during the Covid-19 pandemic. Women may have been hesitant to participate in person, and though I welcomed conducting interviews through an online platform, oral histories are best when the teller and told can build rapport in person. Another limitation was time. The pandemic forced many Black women to teach as well as care for their loved ones. They may not have had time to participate in two interviews for at least one hour each. Mental health may have also been a limitation. Teachers are tired and overworked, so they may not have had the mental space to participate. Lastly, participants may have worried about their job security. The topics BWTs discussed in this dissertation may be considered controversial to some populations. Teachers who wanted to participate might have feared retribution if they shared their stories and experiences with a public audience. Septima Clark was fired for being a member of the NAACP, (Charron, 2009) and the State of Georgia has passed a bill requiring teachers to stay silent about divisive concepts (Bernstein, 2022). Now more than ever Black women need their jobs and may not have wanted to risk putting their careers in jeopardy.

Delimitations

I designated the delimitations of my research by defining the group I wanted to study. I only included cisgendered Black women. I could have included trans women as the stories of Black trans teachers is a heavily under researched topic. As a womanist, I believe in centering Black women K-12 teachers' experiences because their voices and experiences are often ignored

when it comes to policy creation. I have included women who have been teaching for more than five years because I believe they are the future of education and want to understand what might keep them in education until retirement.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) present four ways researchers can increase their research's trustworthiness beyond internal and external validity. They argue for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are all pieces of good research. I addressed credibility by offering the transcripts to all participants to ensure that they are accurate and that they agree with what is presented. When it came to sensitive topics such as sexual abuse or drug usage, I asked the participants if they would like me to redact information from the record and they refused. I believe this is a testament to the power and resilient nature of these Black women.

Chapter Three Summary

Throughout the methodology section, I have provided the logical steps taken in this research. I wanted to show how it was conducted and the methods taken to protect participants. I also outlined settings, procedures and methods used to analyze the data to increase dependability. In chapter four I present the oral histories of Deborah Davis, Tamara Ivy, and SJ Educate. Lastly in chapter five, to ensure confirmability, I will compare my findings from the data to existing literature as well as discuss important implications for the field of education and educational policy studies as a result of this research.

4 RESULTS

The Message

It was an absolute honor for me to sit and listen as the women told the stories of their lives. To be welcomed into one's physical home and mental home of memories is a treasure. The stories collected reflect only a snippet of the extraordinary experiences of three different Black women, from three different generations, who all happened to become teachers. Their memories were like jewels in a chest, some gems easily recalled, shiny and new, while others sat buried, perhaps they were more painful, perhaps they considered them unremarkable, but I will forever be appreciative of them for them entrusting me with their gems and gemstones. Black women are not a monolith. In telling their stories they were often reconstructing their experiences to share how their experiences influenced their perceptions on activism, racism, sexism, and the many other pandemics they may have faced silently to survive until the sun rose the next day. Often, I sat enamored, open-mouthed, as each woman recalled poignant moments in their lives. I began to see them as pieces of my personal story before my very eyes. I am dedicated to maintaining the authenticity of each woman's story. I transcribed each interview because I wanted to keep editing to a bare minimum. The stories shared by the incredible women who allowed me to interview them reflect the scale and complexity of the lives of activist Black women, living and working in Atlanta, while navigating their wellness during life's pandemics.

The original topics for the interviews included: background biographical information, activism, motherhood, wellness, spirit, and life's pandemics have been modified in the presentation of the women's narratives. The purpose of this change is to provide the reader with a richer understanding of each woman's experiences. The categories of the narratives are as follows:



Figure 3. The Categories of the Narratives

Growing Up from the Black Bottoms: The Origin Stories of Three Black Women Teachers

All of the women interviewed shared familial origin stories from the Southeastern portion of the United States. They each conveyed similar sentiments about the South as home even though two of them grew up in the Northern and Midwestern portion of this country. Their recollections uncovered the joys and sometimes the pains of living life in the South as Black people. All of them indicated that their parent's Southern roots colored their experiences growing up. Stories about family, community, and love were often shared throughout our interviews, with each woman firmly believing that their mothers had the most impact on why they decided to go to college and subsequently become teachers.

Historically, kinship is an important feature of the Black family. There is a strong sense of community and pride in what one has shown in the testimonies that follow. From relatives

who fostered love and light in them to those who took advantage and attempted to dim their stars, each women recalled family members who impacted their childhood. Most of the participants come from single parent homes with their parents divorcing during their adolescence. Others lost their father at an early age and found themselves looking to grandfathers to support them into adulthood. Be that as it may, every woman has an origin story and in the telling of one's story we may garner clues on what shaped them to be the people they are today.

The Book of Ms. Deborah Davis

Ms. Davis and I first talked on the phone in early February. A colleague of mine from my doctoral program had shared her information, proclaiming, "I know the perfect person for you to interview!" Upon learning that Ms. Davis had grown up in Harlem during the 1960s and worked at the University of the Nation of Islam school as a teacher in the early 1970s, I was eager to hear her story. A wonderful orator with a euphonious voice and beautiful smile, Ms. Davis was not shy about telling her story. She warmly recalls her Southern origins.

My name is Deborah Ann Brett Davis. I was born in Charleston, SC. My mother was a teacher. My father was a Brick Mason. My mother actually wanted to be a Home Economics teacher. And she went to Allen University in Columbia, SC. And she said that umm, you know, they gave her a class schedule, and she just did what they told her to do. And somewhere along the line, it got mixed up. She ended up being an elementary school teacher, but she never, you know, said no, that's not what I want to be. She just followed what they gave her. She's one of seven. And when my grandfather asked who wanted to go to college, He said I don't have a lot of money, but I may be able to help her little bit, she was the only one of the seven that raised her hand. So, she went to college. She would cry when the kids, her brothers, and sisters, came home and she couldn't do the

homework, so they would teach her. So, she was reading before she actually got to school.

Umm. Back then, you're poor in Moncks Corner, South Carolina. She slept in the room with my parents for a while, and then she said, when my grandfather wanted to get frisky, my grandma said no, you gotta build another room. So she would be, you know, sitting on the bed and my- her, my grandfather would come to visit. And he had a big booming voice. And she was scared of him so, she would hold her book up in front of him, you know while she was talking, he would say that gal is smart, that gal is smart. You know, and words do make people. You know, she was smart and believing that she was smart. So, she was the only one that wanted to go to college. So, she went to Allen University. And I have a letter somewhere here that, where they wrote my grandfather telling her what the tuition was. Something like \$25 for the semester. I mean, something unbelievable.

But yeah. So, when I was little, I would say I wanted to be a teacher. My mother was a teacher and at that time she was teaching high school and umm, as a matter of fact, one of her high school students I met after I came to New York and became Muslim, and when I taught at the Muslim school I taught his son, and he was an Imam. What you would consider a minister, and he actually performed my wedding ceremony, so just a small world. The people who migrated from the South, South Carolina to New York and these things sort of they gather.

My father's side of the family, they were workers. My father was a Brick Mason. But my father was frustrated and when he met my mother, she thought he was a college student cause he hung out with the college students. But he wasn't a college student. He

was a voracious reader, which, I take after him. He became a victim of alcoholism but, drunk or sober, I never saw him without a book. He always had a book in his pocket somewhere.

And you know that didn't work out, you know? And so, she tried to leave, and he would always find her. So finally, she snuck off and we snuck off to New York. And he didn't know anybody in New York. And so, we stayed with my aunt for a while, and then she got her own apartment. I'm thinking to myself, why did you bring us to this dark place? You know? Because the buildings were tall and blocked out the sun. The concrete, you know, we came from trees, and grass, and dirt. And the first day I was there, I was attacked by another little kid. Oh yeah. It was a dog-eat-dog world. And so, she got her own apartment. We lived on the same block with her sister, some of my cousins, and second cousins and whatnot. Harlem 115th St.

We went to school; she had a new job, and she couldn't take time off. Now she couldn't teach in New York because she had to take the certification test. She had test anxiety. My father was the one that helped her pass her finals to graduate, and he was the one that helped her pass her certification. He drilled her. That's the man that didn't go to college. OK. So, but when we got up there, she asked my aunt to take me for that first day of school and she said, tell them to test her. Don't let them put her in just... just tell them to test her. So, my aunt said OK, but then my mother went to work. My aunt was like, Yeah, she ain't. Deborah aint special she goes. So, she didn't tell them anything, so they put me in a regular 2nd grade class and after two weeks they moved me to a gifted class.

So, there was there was a lot of jealousy and envy going on there so but anyway. We all went to the school, PS10. Looked like a castle. Our teacher was Miss Brown. We called her Ms. Witchy Brown because she always wore black. She had a mole on her nose like, you know, she was a good teacher. But the building was being condemned. It was too old. There was no kitchen. They brought our lunch in. So, you know, by the time you the last one to get soup out of that soup vat it was whatever.

So, they dispersed us to go to different schools. I was the only one that went to public school 180 in this direction, and everybody else went to PS81, I never questioned it. All the cousins and friends on the block, I never, ever questioned it. I was going to the new school where they had hot lunch and, you know, good teachers. It was a gifted school. 3rd grade. I never questioned it. So, we would all leave the house, the block, and go to the corner. They would go that way (pointing left). I would go that way (pointing right). Never questioned it. You know, so, I had a good experience, because I loved school.

Oh about my family. I found out on my mother's side that French is a part of our heritage. French and Haitian. OK. You know, there was a botanist in France, and he was umm contracted to do some work in Haiti and that's where he met my great, great, great grandmother and at the time, you know, white and black, you couldn't be married. So, they got together. They had several kids and then he was commissioned to come to the United States to Charleston, you know as a botanist, to do some work. There is a rose called the Manigault Rose that he developed cuttings from whatever and, but they lived together but couldn't live together as husband and wife, because it was against the law to

be married. So, there is some French in the background. I don't think my mother I don't think she knew that at that time. He brought her from Haiti to the United States.

I'm the only girl in between two boys and because of my personality, everybody thought I was the oldest. In addition, I was always bigger than my older brother and because he was... we have pictures where he would come right here to my shoulder and later on with the test, they found that that he was, that somebody in our building, in our tenement building had tuberculosis. And when we all had to be tested, my brother's test had a positive reaction. He didn't have it. But he was susceptible to it. And so, they started giving him vitamins and whatnot. And he shot up that year, and my reign (as the biggest) was over.

The Book of Ms. Tamara Ivy

Ms. Ivy, or Tam as she asked me to call her, contacted me by email after a close colleague from my doctoral program shared my flyer at the high school where he teaches. Tam is small in stature but certainly a spitfire when it comes to teaching, mentoring, and sharing the gospel. She officially started her career as a teacher in Detroit public schools, but in all actuality her entry into teaching started way before she entered college.

My name is Tamera Lashana Ivy. Whoop whoop! I was born in Detroit, MI. From Patricia Ivy and Roger Ivy, my family origins root in Detroit, but from my parents' perspective I'm from Alabama and Mississippi, so I have some southern roots, and a little Southern drawl that comes out every time I try to say some things, but I got the drawl because when I was little, I used to make fun of my cousins every year coming down South. And so, it just rubbed off on me. So, they say, never say never and don't make fun of people. And that's what happened.

Now the school I went to was in a historic part called the Black Bottom where they had the '60s riots. I think it was the '60s riots. That whole part of Detroit had burned up, and after the riots, I want to say in the late '70s, they built it back up. So, I was like 5 minutes from there, if you ever heard of Belle Isle? That's a historic area. I could actually walk to Belle Isle. So that's the area. And then behind us, 2 minutes behind us is Indian Village where a lot of your prominent black people in Detroit lived as well.

My father worked for Chrysler. My grandfather had worked for Chrysler. So yeah, everybody you talked to worked in one of the big three, Ford, GM, and Chrysler. They worked overtime, you know, to make more money than what they were getting paid. They would have a lot of layoffs. My dad experienced a layoff and then that caused him to go work for the city of Detroit as a bus driver and that's where he retired from. My experiences in Detroit were fine. You know, I was in the neighborhood. It didn't really get drug, drug infested until after I graduated from high school. But during high school, yes, there were drugs in the community, but our block club was real strong. You know, we had the neighborhood watch where people looked out for each other during that time.

It was really family oriented. Everybody lived like either next door to their grandparent or aunt and, so yeah. So, my grandparents were in the middle. We were on the left side. One of my uncles was on the right side, which was my grandfather's brother, then my grandfather's brother's son lived on the other side. Then you know how we have play aunts and uncles. I had a play aunt and uncle down the street. That's because my mother 's best friend's people down there. Right. So, we were all family. My Aunt Ruth lived like 8 blocks away, so it was all family oriented during that time. A lot of family.

My caregivers basically were my, of course, my mom. They divorced when I was seven years old. They were high school sweethearts. So, she took care of me, and especially my grandparents, my grandma and grandfather, who are her parents and we lived right next door to my grandparents after the divorce. So, my grandparents played an influential, you know, aspect in my life due to my mom always working, you know, trying to make ends meet for my brother and me. So, I have a brother and he's two years younger than me. When they say sibling rivalry, it is right there because I always tell my mom you raised me, but you pacify your son. So yes, that's kind of like an origin to place.

I have a nickname. My nickname is Woo Baby. Yes. I got it from my uncle. He doesn't have any children. He passed away years ago, but. His name was Jeff Melton, Jeffries Melton, and I got the nickname because he used to babysit me. And I would always be over there, he would always have this drink that looked like Kool-Aid. But it wasn't Kool-Aid. So come to find out, it was Tom Collins. And when I was two years old, I would always ask for it. And he would spoil me because I was the only granddaughter niece or whatever. And I would go around saying woo, woo! So, he started calling me Woo Baby. So, my mom found out she cussed him out. She got into him. So, she's like, you getting my baby drunk at two years old. So that's a little funny story I wanted to share.

My mom was a clerk at the Detroit Public Library. She went to school for business education to be a teacher. She went to Eastern Michigan, but she dropped out because she partied too much. OK. So that's one thing and she always wanted me to go to college, finish college because she didn't do it. And you know how some of our parents

live their dreams through us. So that was one of the things that I accomplished for her, graduating from college.

My grandfather had to quit school and was in 12th grade, yeah, and help take care of the family because they lived in Sparta, Alabama. And my grandmother never went to college as well. My grandmother is from Marion, and they were high school sweethearts. My grandparents had four [children]. My uncle Jimmy, he was the oldest. I never met him because he died before I was born. He had caught a Charlie Horse in the pool and my uncle, his younger brother, thought he was, you know, playing cause they would always play in the pool, and they didn't get in there to save him in enough time. So, I never met my uncle, but I heard such great things about him. And he was a junior, a James junior. So, then I had my other uncle, J, the one that was giving me drinks. But let me go back. So, my Uncle James was married. He didn't have any children. And my uncle J, he never had any children, but he had girlfriends. But he was my favorite. And then I have, I had an aunt, but she was stillborn, her name was Yvonne, and then my uncle. That's the only uncle that's in that family part right there, that's in my immediate family. He is my uncle, Ant that's still living, and he's back home. He used to live in Chicago for a while, but he's back home in Detroit. He has a son.

My mom basically was the only girl because you know her sister was stillborn. My favorite aunt, Aunt Chris, bless her soul. She lived in Sparta, well, Marion, Alabama. So, one of my fondest memories [is of] Aunt Chris. She started off as a teacher and then she was a principal. Every summer she would do summer school, so she would have me in the classes with her. I would be like her teacher aides. So, you know, I felt special. And then just being around her, she was one of the ones that taught me how to cook, even

though I hate cooking. But you know down South, well they really cook, and she was trying to teach me how to cook chitlins. No! I'm good. She would always make fun. She's like you're such a city girl. I'm like, yeah.

They would have these big picnics and being that they were on a farm too, girl, one year I don't forget they put a pig, hung them on a clothesline. And they were showing the kids, especially the ones that's from Michigan. We were from the city. We would come down. They sliced the pig in the middle, and they would show us all the parts that we would eat right. So then it was time to eat. I said I'm not eating it. And they was like why? I said it didn't come from a grocery store. Now I'm nine years old telling them what I'm not gonna do, and they were like, Tamara, you're so city. It's the same food, but it's fresh. So me, I ate it anyway, because you know, they were gonna beat my butt if I aint eat it. But it was just funny how, you know, being from the city you're like, oh, you don't really pay attention to where it's coming from. And then me getting to experience my family owning a farm. You know, I was able to tell the students, I teach, you know, hey the food is fresher when you're on farm, all our stuff is, you know, produced.

But my grandparents traveled a lot. So during the summer times, we would always go down South, to visit the family. One of the things they taught me is how to be very family oriented, keeping in touch with everybody. So that's one of my downfalls to keep. I wouldn't call it a downfall, but you know, when other family members don't reciprocate you trying to keep in touch with them and then they're always saying, well, you know, don't let it be a funeral you know, when we all get together, but when you're trying to do a family reunion, you don't come through, then what you expect? So that's our summer. The fondest ups and down memories I have.

The Book of SJ Educate

SJ and I have known each other for over 15 years. We first met in Baton Rouge, Louisiana while undergraduate students in college. We went through the same teacher preparation program at Georgia State University. Every time I witness her teaching I am reminded of what it means to be a teacher who is passionate about the calling of educating children. Her origin story centers on growing up in a small town in rural Louisiana where the people still farm the land and use its resources to survive.

My name is SJ. I'm originally from Louisiana, a small rural community called Keatchie. Yeah, that's where I'm from. I was born in Shreveport, Louisiana. That's the nearest local major city. And I was born to uh parents that were married. I have an older sister. We are 10 years apart. I also have an older brother. My mom had, you know, like retail jobs, she worked for Montgomery Ward. She worked for JC Penney and then after that she worked for about 30, almost 40 years for Tyson, the chicken company in Carthage, Texas. She worked in the plant for almost 40 years. My father, I think he was a welder by trade and then the company that he was working for, I don't know, they went bankrupt or something like that, but they laid a lot of people off like in the I guess early '90s or something like that. They laid people off so he did things like cleaning banks. He was a janitor. You could say a janitor. Cleaning banks. He worked at JCPenney as a janitor. Custodial duties. Things like that.

Where I'm from, it's very rural. Some people would like to say country living. You could say that. Very rural, with a lot of land. Back when I was younger, it was a lot of trees. But you know as these things go and time goes on. You know, they knock a lot of the trees down for oil rigs. People move away. Farmhouses, get torn down, things like

that, but where I lived, is just like a very you know patched together roads. UM, bumpy. Like I said, it's a community called Keatchie, so houses are very spaced apart. So like where I lived I do have neighbors that I could probably walk to. It would take maybe ten minutes to walk down my, walk down my road [driveway] to walk down the road, that leads from my house, to their main driveway. Maybe about 10 minutes to get from my doorstep to their doorstep. But this is a community like, you kind of like, [only] talk to people you know.

My grandmother lived within walking distance, like three minutes next door to [our school bus driver] Miss G. Most of the houses in this community are far apart from each other like maybe half a mile apart from each other. Uh, the store they had when I was younger, that is still open. It was probably about three to four miles away and it was like a very small general country store where you still could get credit like you can go there and say, hey, let me get let me get \$5.00 in gas and put it on my tab and I'm paying on Friday, things like that. You know the country general store is so little, [it had] cheese meat, saltine crackers, and things like that. You can get soda water. You can get some chips. Ice pop or something like that.

You will go further to another little town called Logansport and that was probably about at least ten miles further down the road. And it's way bigger, probably about five or six hundred people there give or take back then. Small high school. Elementary and middle school all combined in one huge building. It's sectioned out from the elementary side. The year that I went to 1st grade, that's when the new school was finished. And everybody was able to move into the new school. So, I spent my kindergarten year at the Rosenwald School, which had been there for a very long time. Very old school. I think it

was part of the schools that were provided for Black kids or something like that. And that was the last year of that school being open, my kindergarten year. And then we went to the new school.

Logansport was a very small place. We had like one grocery store there. I think it was a Piggly Wiggly. They had like a Dollar General. It's still there. It is a Dairy Queen there which is like a staple in like all these small towns, you have like a Dairy Queen you know. Like all small Louisiana and Texas towns there will be a Dairy Queen. Yeah, a little car wash. And the school. I don't think they got a library until like, I don't know, I think I was maybe in high school. They have a library. And it was very, very small. You know, you can drive through the town in three minutes, like getting from point A to point B, driving straight through. It's a border town with Texas. So, as soon as you cross the Sabine River, you are in Texas. Just local people, Black and white people in a very small place.

My maternal grandfather was a very hardworking man. Uh, he was just like, a very manly man. Didn't take a lot of crap. Didn't really like play any games and things like that, but he was also a kind man. Funny man, kind, not very balanced, I would say, but I learned things about him being like I guess what, we would call today like an entrepreneur. He was someone who employed a lot of young people in his community. Back then, you know the jobs that they would do is like, you know you're going to be a farmer or you're going to go bale hay. Things like that you would be doing for white people.

And from what I was told I think he kind of like, you know, saved his money, got his money up to be able to buy trucks to haul logs and things like that. And so he

employed his brothers and other young people in the community. And uh did different things like that, long haul hauling log trucks, bale hay, and things like that. But you know, doing it for himself. And so I thought that was amazing to learn. He thought about, you know, being self-sustainable for himself.

He and my grandmother had their home built in the 1960's and uh to be able to do something like that, that was probably monumental for that time period, you know, especially in the rural community, to be able to get a 1, 2, 3, 4 bedroom house built. You know, still small, small bedrooms and things like that, but just to be able to provide something like that for your children. Him and my grandmother had eight kids, and so just to be able to provide that was a major accomplishment, I think. And even that wasn't enough room, but you know. It was still something. They went from a very small like shack type of home to be able to build a brick home. And so just knowing that he accomplished those types of things in that time period in the sixties, fifties, where there's a lot of racism going on, a lot of division. Not making a lot of money. I think that made me feel proud. Proud to, you know, be his granddaughter and know that, you know, I came from the likes of someone who had some get up and go about themselves and wanted to. Cared about not only, you know his family, but other people in the community and wanted to employ other people and wanted to see other people do good, and knowing that he encouraged young people to go to school and to leave that rural area because it was nothing there. So just hearing those things about him make me feel really good.

Like I said, I lived in a very rural community. So as a small child. I wasn't around a lot of other kids, a lot of the time, and I'm thinking back around, maybe like around the age of five to six. I don't think it was any more kids or cousins around my age that lived

where I lived. A lot of my aunts and uncles had moved. So my mother was still living there and so I guess I was just kind of like alone a lot as a small kid before I could go to elementary school. I had to spend most of my days with my great grandmother. That's my grandfather's mother who was still alive then. She would keep me while my mom would go to work. So I spent a lot of my days there. I do remember being bored and only getting to watch like Sesame Street. I would get to watch Sesame Street to a certain amount of time. And then she was watching her soaps. For the rest of the day, pretty much. I would have to eat the same thing every day unless my mom would send me with some little snack, sometimes she might, and she maybe not, but my great grandmother would cook salmon cakes every day, rice, and sugar. Just food I as a five-year-old thought that I just didn't like. I would say, well, I didn't find it appealing. Yeah, that was my existence as a small, small child.

And then, you know, I also experienced some trauma there, realizing that, you know, I got molested there at my grandmother's house when I guess an older cousin would come who would get kicked out of school, you know, from time to time, things like that. And then that, like growing up a little bit more, getting to go to school. You know that's a little bit more entertaining. Get to go to school, be with other kids, learn this and that, but primarily, I lived my childhood kind of bored because like I said, it wasn't any other kids my age that lived in that area. It wasn't like, oh, I'm gonna take you on a play date with somebody like, that's not the type of life I lived with my parents. I think my excitement would probably come for things I would get to do like if I would get to go somewhere. My father was from Shreveport, which was a little bit more highly populated

than the rural area that I grew up in. So I would get to go there, visit with my cousins, have definitely a lot more fun. A lot more experiences. So those things made me happy.

There were times periodically when some of my cousins would move back to the rural area for whatever reason it would be, and so they would be there for like small periods of time, maybe like three months or something like that based on whenever my aunt or uncle moved away to do whatever they do. So those things brought me, joy, just to have kids my age closer or somebody to talk to, play with. My sister is a lot older than me. We're ten years apart. By the time I made it to 10, she, you know, she's already gone as far as like age is concerned. Like 18, and I'm 8. She's already out of the house. We never really got along when I was a kid, I was pretty much by myself, and I think because of that I'm OK with like, you know, spending a lot of time with myself and being by myself, cause I grew up that way. So I guess I had a very lonely childhood or secluded.

Sometimes, You Have to Retreat to Be Well

Activism and wellness may seem like two topics that are on completely different ends of the spectrum of being. As shared in the literature review, activist Black women teachers often sacrificed their personal lives for the sake of teaching. The major question for this research asks how activist Black women teachers resist life's pandemics as they navigate the educational system. Black women take care of their home, families, and communities out of an abundance of love. However, just because we have the ability to do something does not mean we have the capacity to live with the long standing results of our sacrifices. Our lives must center our wellness if we are going to stay in the fight of life and experience personal joys in the process. I originally sought to divide wellness into five categories which were designated by the research participants. The participants each defined wellness in their own ways, but the words mental,

physical, emotional, and financial wellness came up over the course of our interviews. Wellness is a practice, just as activism is a practice. In the sections below each Black woman teacher shares what they do to support their wellness. All 3 teachers retreat in different ways to be well.

The Wellness Codes of Ms. Deborah Davis

Wellness is physical, mental, spiritual you know the state of your health, oh and financial. As a teacher that has to be included. I love Alvin Ailey, and we would go see the show every year. And I like Revelations. I like the music of Revelations. Now, are you familiar with that? OK, one of the songs is Wade in the Water, Sinner Man, you know this ballet? He wrote that his momma was big in the church. He was raised up in the church. This ballet, this group of dances and songs are from that and a lot of times I would play that tape to put myself in a certain mood.

So, some of it was music. And then on the way home from school I would play the oldies. See, I can sing along and that helps release some of that tension because you're going home and you're in traffic and, you know, coming home from school. So, I would play the oldies. I like music. Oh, yeah! Four Tops. Sing Martha. The Marvelettes. And you know, Otis Redding and, you know, some of the oldies that my mom listened to, she would listen to Arthur Prysock and just, you know, just those. And that would help to keep me calm. You know, and I usually listened to something that was upbeat on the way. Like I said, Revelations. Yeah. Yeah, Revelations and sometimes oldies but goodies, but more, going home.

Music, it got you in the mood, so to speak. It helped you. Whatever little white cloud, I don't say black cloud, little white cloud that was hanging over your head, you know you can push that away to focus. It doesn't make it go away permanently but clears

that away from me. I love music. That's a song, by the O'Jays. And I've always loved music. And there's an uncanny connection I have with music, I think, because sometimes even if I'm hearing a piece I haven't heard before I know where you're going with your next bar.

Then the colors that I wear help me be well. I wear red or yellow or bright orange on my head. And you know those little kids right, "Why you got that rag on your head?" I say, "Hold on. We have to have a fireside chat. Close the door." Other kids like "Oh man, she wears it. It's called a Gele. It's not a rag, it's from Africa." And they start teaching them, but I was telling them colors help to brighten and lighten your mood. You know, it's not so much what somebody else thinks looks good. It's what you think looks good, you know? And bright colors do give you energy. We come over here to this monochromatic, mono world and everything has to match, and everything has to be subdued. No, and if you're Black, you know you ain't supposed to wear bright colors and if you big oh God. You ain't supposed to wear bright colors, so to bright colors, no, no, no, no. So bright colors made me feel. I used my colors. I used music. I use aromatherapy because I would have candles in my room sometimes. Just having that classroom neat and clean. That too. If your environment is neat, that helps this up here [pointed to her head] to stay neat. That's what I thought. Think. And so those are the things I did for my wellness. Being to class on time helped. Maybe not rushing. I used to get to work like 40 minutes before I was due. I did that in the beginning or an hour before. When I got near the end, in the last five years, it wasn't that I wasn't awake, I was swinging in at the very last minute, because I was just... I was, I was in despair. I didn't like it. I didn't want to be there.

Ms. Deborah Davis Photovoice Activity 1



Figure 4 Ms. Deborah Davis Photovoice Activity 1

On the topic of wellness she shared that “my skin care products illustrate how this type of activity supported my mental health, in addition to financial health while teaching.”

The Wellness Codes of Ms. Tam Ivy

For wellness? Massages. That's my go to, massages. I like those, especially when I was in a car accident and I still have my back issues, so that works for me. And soothing music. A glass of wine every now and then. Vacations. Jazz. Even a live band. I want to relax. I'll go to see a live band, or I'll just have a concert in my house, put on some jazz music. Keep it moving. Clean up the house. Another wellness item for me is

getting my basic checkups. Making sure you know everything's good. I try to eat healthy. I was a Pescatarian for about 2 1/2 years and then I went back to being a carnivore. And my downfall, I don't really exercise like I should, but I try to at least 2-3 times a week being that my back is an issue.

At school, I won't stay in my room during lunch. Some teachers stay in their room and eat. I go down to the sub person that does the sub (listings) and we have lunch in her room where it's quiet and she has this aromatherapy thing going on. I'll be in there, or, if I want excitement, I go sit at the security desk with the security guard and watch him work and laugh because its characters coming in the building.

The Wellness Codes of SJ Educate

When I'm in a good flow of like working out and I have the ritual going I'm known to like, you know, have good spurts. Maybe like I would say like two or three months I can like go steadily to the gym or whatever it is that I use to do working out in the house. That makes me feel well, when I work out. I don't know how you feel about this, but reefer may help me feel well and may support my wellness practices. You know, and it's not something I do every day. It's just something I enjoy that helps me with my wellness. And taking time for myself like I said, I grew up, uh, having a lot of personal time. I spend a lot of time with myself, so I think having time for myself is wellness for me. Also getting to do things I like, such as hobbies. You know, and having joy and laughing as well.

I also engage in wellness when I'm engaged in my work out. When I'm working out I listen to music or most of the time, I listen to books, I found that I like listening to books as I work out. So it kind of gives me something uh worthwhile to focus on versus

my listening to like the fast-paced music. So I have a, I don't know, it just might be like a good fusion of happiness, because I know I'm working out to like you know help provide my body with outlets to you know, maybe gain like some mass or lose fat or something like that, but at the same time I'm either learning something and learning about something or just enjoying a novel. Something I'd be listening to is Octavia Butler during workouts. So that's the treat.

Wellness Activism, A Fight for My Right to Live

The idea of wellness activism has developed over the course of completing this dissertation. The stories I am sharing below are not in any particular order. Activism, at its root, requires action. The stories of these teachers in action who were willing to take a stand, even if it seemed to be an unpopular stand, for their wellness are expressed in the stories below. Wellness activism exists at the intersections of the many pandemics we encounter in life as Black women, and the actions we take to declare to not only ourselves but to the world that we will not stand by and continue to be treated as less than, can be powerful. As Sojourner Truth asked over a century ago Aint I a Woman?

Tam Ivy

I can't think of words offhand. This was with my own people at a school district [back home]. One of my first years I was at the high school in Detroit, one of the little boys, I fought. We were, I was doing hall duty. And I told C, I said don't come down this hallway unless you have a pass. He was coming in and he was like Bitch! Yeah. You know, so he's like 5'11. I'm 5'4 in some heels. And he was in my personal space, and he was "Bitch this" and he hit me. During this thing I blacked out. I beat his butt. It took... I was teaching English and it was the Shakespeare class, I'll never forget because I had

them kids rolling. It was in my first period Shakespeare class. It took three of the football players and security to get me off that boy. That's how bad I blacked out. And so of course, charges were pressed because come to find out, he was high. Him and his momma had just got through fighting. They called his mom and she came and she said Ms. Ivy, press charges on him because I just got through beating his butt too, and he shouldn't be coming up there disrespecting you. And I said yeah, because all I told him was don't come down this hallway unless you have a pass. That's it. And so the administrators, they were males, one of the male administrators he gave me a pink slip, he said you can no longer work here at O School and I'm like, why? I was self-defending myself. I'm little and the kids were, you know, the kids have my back because the kids beat him up when when he finally got out of jail, they beat him down. So, I was like, so why am I getting punished? And they was like (rawraw), I was like OK, whatever. So that's when I left Detroit Public Schools. That's one of the reasons. So I was like if this was one of the white teachers y'all wouldn't have done that and it was white teachers there and he didn't say anything, so I guess. Because they did have a teacher, it was a black student and a white teacher had an altercation. And they didn't do anything to him. They just put him on suspension for a couple of days. But then too it was self-defense in his case as well.

Tam Ivy Photovoice Activity 1



Figure 5 Tam Ivy Photovoice Activity 1

Tam Ivy Photovoice Reflection 2 emailed to (BWTcodesAtl@gmail.com)

“Family is my heartbeat! I love being around my family. Pray, Love, Fellowship, Eating are just a few of the values that has been instilled in me. My family is a PRAYING Family. Praying is the core of our being.”

SJ Educate

So what happened was, this is like my third, this was my third year of teaching. Yeah, I was in my third year of teaching at the school, I think that I had did a lot of good root work as far as building relationships with the students, staff, family, and families in those communities. Things were going well for me personally. This was in the same year I was voted Teacher of the Year. Like I said, things were going well, but at the same time, at the start of this year, there was a change in administration. One of the principals had decided to retire, the head principal, so we got a new principal. As the year progressed, things became a little shaky because, you know, a new person was coming in. Of course they're going to be doing new things, doing it their way or whatever. Like I

said, I personally did not have any issue with the new administrator. Like I said, things for me were going great. This is a female principal who didn't have as much experience with teaching. Didn't have any experience! It's like this is I think her first time being here and she's a Black woman.

She was a Black woman. I mean, she was OK. Like she was nice. I never, I didn't have any issue with her. But you know, I guess I would say that I have become an individual, I guess community based or... It's not about me. It's not just about me, it's about us. So like, there were a lot of unfair practices, you know? Things going on that the principal was kind of throwing at the school staff. I'd say that. It was very distasteful. Very distasteful and I didn't like it. For me, it was just like, you know. This is new, like I said I'm still a new teacher, my third year. And still trying to, you know, take care of business, and do what I'm supposed to do, but with our school. But the school morale had begun to go down.

People were trying to like, leave. It was a lot going on. Um so I would say. I'm gonna say this as a young teacher, I probably should have made my concerns vocal to the administrator and I did not do so, you know. And looking back, I think I regret that. It's a way. It's always a way to advocate. You can do it many different ways. And this was like a silent protest or something like that, but it didn't serve me I would say that. It didn't serve me. So, I won the Teacher Year award and this administrator, you know, tried to give me gifts. Yes, just give me gifts she tried to befriend me I think in a way and there was nothing wrong with it, but I think that I just didn't like what was going on in the school and how she approached other people and decided to treat other people in school. I felt like, you know, you kind of disrupting this community, this school community, this

school morale. And I'm not with that. I don't like that. And so I wasn't accepting of her friendship and things of that nature. And so I felt like she decided to come for me. And so uh, they have a measurement they call TKES, where teachers have to get, uh observed and things like that. I had never had any bad observations. I've never had anything, you know, disparaging and all of a sudden, it pops up, she uh, you know, calls me unprofessional and some other things that were, that was definitely not true.

She called me unprofessional, and if I'm not trying to accept your gifts and things, like that is unprofessional, then I'm unprofessional. But I never disrespected her. I've never said anything bad to her, never cursed to her and nothing like that. But like I said, looking back, I probably should have explained my position about what was going on in the school. And voiced my concern, and I did not do that. And so I decided that I needed to abruptly remove myself from the situation. That caused me to have about three more years of some issues with my certification, but you know I ended up getting my certification, so it's all good. So learning situations. I left that school mid-year. So after the Christmas break I did not return.

SJ Educate Photovoice Activity 1



Figure 6 SJ Educate Photovoice Activity 1

SJ Photovoice Reflection 1 (emailed to bwtcodesatl@gmail.com)

“I wanted to revisit the conversation because I now feel like I left out some things that shaped who I am now as an educator. I briefly spoke about my experience leaving the first school where I was the teacher of record because of the actions of the leadership but I didn’t speak about how my actions affected the other teachers in there. I was told that the way that I chose to advocate for myself gave other teachers confidence and courage to do the same for themselves. The profession itself has a unspoken Stockholm syndrome vibration attached to it. Because teachers converse amongst each other about how this unfair or the unrealistic expectations of the job

especially pertaining to standardized testing. But many of us never take the grievances to the head of the snake. But I did that. Only to meet another link in the chain who didn't care and felt like my grievances held no merit."

Ms. Deborah Davis

"In the name of God, most gracious, most merciful.

Remember. What you are is God's gift to you.

What you make of yourself is your gift to God."

-Deborah Davis, Interview 2, February 8, 2023

They weren't interested in my activism. They saw some of it in my Black history programs. The way I conducted the Black History Program, the way I pulled so many people in to help with the Black History Program, they saw it in that you know and The Black History Program, the format changed completely at Lakeside. The format changed completely.

The librarian, who used to be in charge of it, she just wanted somebody to come and tell these Black children a thing or two and she aint like Black children herself. She was white. She aint like Black children herself. Not really, so the kids were excited. You had the drum line, you had the African dancers, you had some history information. The teachers would go back and feed off of it in their classroom. Sometimes that was, you know, their choice. It was exciting. You know, when people left here, they would say did you see so and so? I had special ed kids in the program. One of my dancers, Ida, was in the moderately severe class, and her aunt, who she lived with, would come to rehearsals and she would videotape the rehearsals so Ida could go home and practice more. And when we performed and then afterwards her teacher was like, was that you? They didn't

know. You see what I'm saying? And so how pleasing is that to Ida? Because she looked like everybody else.

On My Job: Motherhood and Black Women

One of the aims of this dissertation was to examine to what extent activist Black women teachers have experienced “motherhood” while teaching and how this experience interacts with their wellness. The labor of teaching and motherhood was experienced by all of the participants. Though each woman is a teacher, a chosen career path, they often found themselves pushed into other jobs as a result of being a teacher. Though only two participants have children, each woman spoke to practicing motherhood in and outside the classroom. This section explores how the act of motherhood often came at the exchange of labor from each woman. The labor extracted, though freely given, came at a cost. Below they share how they gave freely to their students even when at times they had nothing left for themselves.

Ms. Deborah Davis

When I asked Ms. Davis about what it means to be a woman she shared the value of what it means to be a mother, from the perspective of Islam. The concept of mothering is interwoven through much of our interviews together and was hard to wrangle into a few paragraphs. As the mother of four girls, she often found herself sewing custom outfits for their performances and the performances of the many clubs and groups she sponsored as a teacher at Lakeside High.

In Islam, it was taught that Prophet Muhammad, peace, and blessings would be upon him, was asked the question “Who do you revere the most? Who should we revere the most? The mother or the father?” He said the mother. So the person said, “Well, OK. Well, mother's first. Who's next? Who's second?” “The mother.” The woman, female is the mother of civilization. Good God almighty. Civilization comes up through the

mother. "Who's third?" "The mother. Then the father." Oh, smoke. You know that's not the way Arabs treat their wives. I've been over to Mecca, and I've seen a lot of them, not all of them now. And that's not the way African Americans treat their women. That ain't the way whites treat they wives. There aren't a lot of people that I've seen that treat their wives that way.

The last five years of teaching (before retirement in 2012) was hard. The only thing that kept me going was my dance group. The only thing that kept me going was my dance group at Lakeside that I had, cause my dance crew pushed me. Ms. Davis, we want to practice more than once a week. We want to practice two or three days a week and Ms. Davis, we want to start in August when school start. OK. And we want to do more than the Black History program, we want to do other things. OK. And we don't want to stop in February or March, we want to stop in May. OK. And Ms. Davis, you're not charging enough to be a part of this club, you need to charge more. You know, I had some leaders, and once I knew that they were willing to work, and they want to be leaders, I groomed and move them. We did competitions went to Valdosta, did competitions, dance competitions. We came in second, but we won 4-5 hundred dollars. And we were up against the category where were included with adults, we didn't know that. So adults, they got money to go buy all these bling, bling costumes. We didn't have them. I made their costumes. I made that, and I told them. I said look, there's only so much I can do with this because we don't have money, I said. So you're going to have to really work because you will have to dance with your whole body. Which is what you supposed to be doing anyway. Dance with your face. Dance with your hands, you know, and the dance we were doing was called Sonu. And it's a very sensual dance. I tell them, not sexual,

sensual, I said so. You know, if you got a smile and you got, you know, whatever you know, and they did. And they came in second place. They did well. They did so well they looked good a chance to go somewhere, take a bus ride, go somewhere. I was always taking them to a dance conference in July, in Tallahassee. Took them every year just about every year. And that kind of cohesiveness we were the only group Danie, in Lakeside, that took a trip and didn't have problems with sex, drugs, smoking, alcohol. Because they stayed with me.

Time to eat? OK, we going here to the shopping center. You go to the stores, you gotta go to any restaurant in here you want. Well, I want something else. Then you gonna fast today, because we're going to be here. You got a partner you couldn't go to the ice machine without a partner. You couldn't go down to the pool without a chaperone. And after the conference, they usually have a big party in the evening. Well, we going? No. I cant control y'all in that atmosphere. So but anyway so, that was the only thing. That group. Teaching that group and working with that group was what kept me.

Ms. Deborah Davis Photovoice Activity 2



Figure 7 Ms. Deborah Davis Photovoice Activity 2

“Pictures with family, graduations, all stress how important we thought those unions were and which contributed to our well being.”

Ms. Tam Ivy

An integral component of womanism is caring. Tam found herself in a position she had never experienced before when her middle school student shared the news of her pregnancy with her. Then, the student asked Ms. Ivy to accompany her and tell her parents. As a young teacher she automatically thought that this responsibility was not for her shoulders, but in retrospect she appreciated that the student trusted her to this degree. Tam often reflects on how the experience motivates her to continue teaching because she sees her presence as providing a loving and caring space for students to shelter themselves during the rough storms of their teenage years.

My first year of teaching I was the cheerleader coach, and her parents were both preachers. She asked me because I was taking her home that day and that same day, she said, “Ms. Ivy I have something to tell you and I would like you to help me with it” and I’m like what? “I’m pregnant.” I said, I can’t help you with that. Are you sure? And she showed me the little test thing. This is an 8th grade girl. Showed me the little test thing. And she said, “I want you to come in there and tell my parents,” I said that’s not my place boo. Remember. First year teacher. I’m like that’s not my place and she was like, “Well, can you just at least stay in there while I talk to them?” I said OK. So when I went in there, I told them, I can’t remember their last name right now, I told Mr. and Mrs. so and so your daughter has something she wants to tell you, and it’s very serious. I think y’all should sit down for this. And they, you know, respected me because I would come to have dinner with them, you know, because I was the coach, and she took an interest in me. So she was my little mentee and they listened.

Then and I said, OK, I’m going, I just wanted to be here while she told y’all and I’m out. So I left. So the next day, she came to school. She said, “Ms. Ivy we talked about it, you know, they yelled and screamed and everything” cause she was a straight A student and the boy, in the same class as her had straight A’s too, and she was like they were fine with it. But her fine is being like, you know, they were talking to her and not yelling and screaming. “But they did yell,” she said, “well, we’re going to work it out.” I said OK. OK.

And to this day, little Ivy should be in college by now or something. I haven’t heard from her in a couple of years, but that’s the story that anytime I feel down at work, and I feel like I’m not teaching or the kids not getting it, I just think back to that, you

know, like, wow, she thought enough of me to go in there and sit with her, she thought enough of me. I was an influence on her. I told her don't go into education, but she did anyway. Because after all the experiences, we would keep in touch, you know. She majored in the same thing I did. History and English. And when she got in college in her sophomore year, she said "Ms. Ivy, guess what? I'm gonna be a teacher." I said Girl, don't do it. Girl! And she was like, "why?" And I would tell her why. She said to me "Ms. Ivy, but you still teaching. You still made an impact," and she "I told you from day one when I saw you I will always remember you." I said OK, gone head girl. Gone head. So yeah she's teaching. She's teaching. I think she teaches in high school.

SJ Educate

SJ describes herself as "not an overly mother person" and be that as it may, she certainly exhibits qualities of a teacher who cares for students as if they were her own child. She cites her child's experiences in schools as the reason why she decided to pursue a career in education. She believes that all students deserve to learn in a way that values their culture and heritage. In her photovoice activity she shared photographs from her students Problem Solution Project and wrote in the description, "My kids advocating for themselves."

I would say some of these experiences, making these bonds with the children, because you can, you know, when it gives them some type of safety, comfort. No, like I said I'm not really an overly mother person and I have a child, but, some of these kids will, uh, just have made you to be their surrogate mother. Because they just need it so much. Knowing that I am able to provide you know some type of balance that a child who needs a motherly figure or needed something from me, some type of something. Emotionally or whatever that they needed from me, being able to provide that, you know,

I think that's some of the best things, you know, as a Black woman teacher. Because even as a mother, a mother who struggles with motherhood, sometimes when you get it right, that's a good feeling.

Teaching takes time, preparation, and work. When I asked SJ about how her wellness practices interacted with her teaching she shared her workday schedule.

When we came back to in person learning we had to be there at 7:30. And the kids didn't leave until 4:10. Which means you know, you had to stay till like 4:45, or something like that. I won't get home sometimes till 5:00 o'clock. And it it's like the day is gone. And trying to keep up with wellness practices. It's just crazy like, because after I get off work from a long day, I don't even wanna go to the gym. And getting up at like 3 in the morning, 4:00 in the morning trying to go to the gym before work is tedious as well. I would say not having adequate responses to behavior also just has become unbearable. You know, I think the whole response to behavior in the public school system needs to be readdressed. All across the board. Difficult behaviors, consequences. You know, I mean, I think a lot of things in our schools need to be changed as well because like, of course, you need to hold parents accountable. But of course, schools are not community based anymore especially public schools.

SJ Educate Photovoice Activity 2

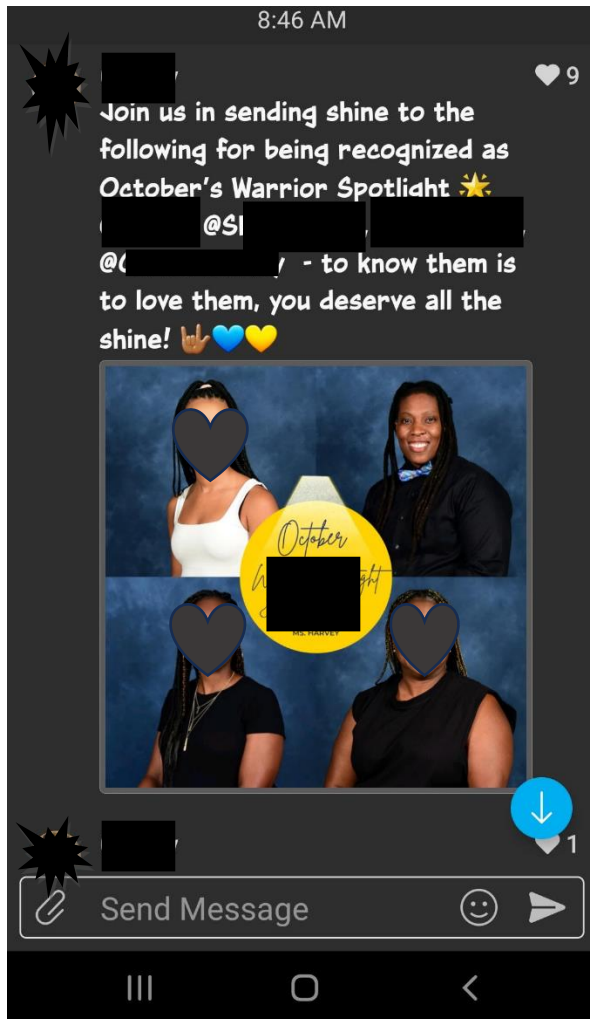


Figure 8. SJ Educate Photovoice Activity 2

For her photovoice activity she shared the following poem.

It's unhealthy to feel inadequate and unheard. It's unhealthy to train your bladder to wait but teachers do it. You ask for a bathroom break too much....

(My School) had teacher leaders....

And how do you process all these inadequacies? Cause you got your kids you got a husband?

You got the surrogate kids in the class

Your side hustle

You got an observation coming up

Education is in the ground zero for unwellness.

That's When the Spirit Shows Up: Black Women and Spirituality.

The major aim of this research was to understand how activist Black women teachers engage their spirits (hearts, minds, and imaginations) to resist the multiple forms of oppression and marginalization we face in the U.S. and across the Diaspora and negotiate the educational profession? All three Black women teachers in this research discussed using their spiritual practices to stay well. Ms. Davis talked about studying The Quran and avoiding eating with the teachers. Tam reads daily devotions to prepare herself for school. SJ shares that she taps into herself by walking or doing work at her altar. Each teacher had a different way of engaging their spirit to stay well.

Ms. Deborah Davis

In Islam, which the word means peace. I find peace. Any issue that you have you can find an answer in the Bible, Torah, Quran because The Creators prophecy is the same. The message is the same with all the prophets and so, sometimes, especially during Ramadan, I would be listening to the Quran on tape, you have to do something. At that time I thought you had to read so many pages per day. I found out that it's not the case. However, I don't meditate. Well, I guess I meditate. But you know all of that when you sit and you've got in the center and you sit and think, yes. Sometimes when I got to school, I would sit in the car, and I would think or sometimes before I drove off to go home. I was sitting back. I don't like going to the teachers lunchroom to eat lunch. You tend to hear all the horror stories about students. I don't want to hear your horror story; I want to have my own opinion. I don't mind getting information from you, but I don't want

your bias to be the driving force, so you know, at Lakeside, I occasionally ate with the teachers, ate on the stage in the lunchroom, you know? And when I first came, the department head was saying that you need to eat lunch with the teachers. I was like why? She said, because, you know you don't eat with them then they think you don't like them and you know. Then, I was Teacher of the Year and all those other kinds of stuff, you know, but I didn't want to eat with them. But see, when we were in our Dekalb County orientation they said don't eat in the teachers lunchroom. And they were talking about why, and I said, "that makes sense."

Ms. Tam Ivy

I say my devotions in the morning because I need to be prayed up before I can enter the building, OK? And I pray you know, and I go to church, I try to go to church every Sunday, cause if I missed like, last Sunday before last, I missed. I felt bad. You know, but I like to be around other people that's like me and just fellowship with other people. My religion, I mean just basically, I like to go to Bible study. I go to the women's prayers called WOW. Women of the Word. That's the second Saturday each month, and I go there and just think about things you know and talk to the women about what's going on. It's a way to relieve stress and we always have a word behind it. So that feels good. My church is in person, it's called Word of Faith. But I'm not a member there, but I go there. I haven't actually joined a church since I moved here [to Atlanta] because I knew I was going to be moving again and the next place I'm moving to will be permanent so...

When I'm passionate about something, and there's a couple of times that the students have seen me shed a tear for a minute and they're like, what's wrong? I just had a moment, you know? So that's how it (spirit) usually shows up. Basically, when I'm

passionate about something you know, the Holy Ghost. When something that's not right, it's like when I know something aint right? It's like that woman intuition being with the Holy Spirit in which I need to pay more attention to, or even when the student tells us when we have our Monday circles which is like a check in, the kids will tell you about their weekend. So if a student tells me something that's really heart felt, then yeah, that's when the Spirit shows up too. I find out that's when I'll mostly be talking about, you know, you a child of God. Don't let that hurt you. And the kids like. Oh, OK.

Tam Ivy Photovoice Activity 2



Figure 9. Tam Ivy Photovoice Activity 2

Tam Ivy Photovoice reflection 1 (emailed to BWTcodesAtl@gmail.com)

“Reading books by spiritual authors such as Joyce Meyers, TD Jakes, and Sarah Jakes Roberts brings me much joy and takes me away from the stressors of the day. In the morning, I wake up and read my devotions because I want God to guide my thoughts, words, and actions throughout day. I also like to journal. Journaling allows me to really express myself as well as for reflection.”

SJ Educate

So you know my spiritual practices, I think have allowed me to operate from a place of compassion and love and nurture and wanting to be the best that I could you know. For every child that I came in contact with I just want to always be my best and to do what's right, because that's something we always tell the children. To do what is right because it's the right thing to do, and I think when you are living like that, you know, people see. The children do see, you know things kind of show. And not that you're doing it for people to see, but I never- I'll say I've never, really had a lot of difficulty. We all have our trying days, we have our trying students, but things were kind of always able to, you know, pan out or able to level themselves out, you know. And I'm not saying I'm doing everything right, but you know. I think my spiritual practices you know helped me.

So if I was giving you advice on to be like me or something of me, it would be to tap into how you feel. I don't think you have to learn to do nothing because like I said, I operate on how I feel. The feeling within me. What you think you should do. You know? I'm saying, do you feel like praying right now? Do you feel like crying? Do you feel like you need to go take a walk in the park. That will be my starting point or my advice to you to tap into how you feel and think about what you need to do.

Having time for myself when I sit down, maybe sitting down and doing some stretching or sitting at my altar. Like when the house is quiet or nobody's here at home, that makes me [happy]. I feel extremely happy because I can be naked, you know. Stretch my body. Sit at the altar. If I want to pray whatever, be loud. If I want to. So those things that I love and they make me feel good, I like to laugh so, experiencing that makes me feel really good. And when I am with my people, loving on my special person, you know.

SJ Educate Photovoice Activity 3



Figure 10. SJ Educate Photovoice Activity 3

“This is my altar, my spiritual space to be well and get well in all meanings of the word. You have to want to be well. You have to recognize when you are carrying someone else’s energy. Light that sage and call on the ancestors. Yell out devil get off me.”

Black Women Teachers, I Just Want Y’all to Know the Codes

What better way to conclude Chapter Four of this dissertation than with the closing words of advice from each interviewee to Black women teachers present and future? In this chapter I presented the findings on my research concerning the experiences of activist centered Black women teachers. I also addressed the major question in this research by sharing the themes that came up from the tellers during our oral history interviews. I sincerely hope these findings assist another Black woman in prioritizing her health and wellness so that she may have a long and loving career in the profession of education.

Deborah Davis

Toubab [West African name for whites] doesn't necessarily love you or is willing to make a space for you. You will have to make a space for yourself. So where does the word, the phrase Toubab come from? You ever heard? When roots came out that's how we referred to white folks. Toubab don't necessarily love you and are not going to necessarily make you welcome. They're not going to make a space for you necessarily. They will accept you up to a certain level. Once you exceed their expectations then something must be wrong, because there's a possibility that you're actually brighter than them. I mean, my Mama taught me this when I was young, and I've seen evidence of it everywhere that I've gone. Is it everybody? No. So, African American teachers band together and increase your strength. I could not have done that Black History Program and it was always a success, in the years that I was there, without those other teachers

helping, contributing. So, you know, not just women men too, but band together, women band together. Be able to support one another. We have to support one another.

We have to support one another and work together where we can work together. Everybody can't work together. It is not necessary that everybody works together. But in order to strengthen, you know what it is you have and what you want to do. You gotta find that support. You gotta find that support. And even if you just find one. But recognize all the things you're fighting against. Racism. Sexism. You know, with me I'm a minority in many ways. I'm Muslim. You know, so you have to yeah, you have to find ways to do things. Bill Cosby spoke at one of the Spellman graduations. And he told the women. He said, "Don't be sitting here and looking to a Fortune 500 company to give you some great CEO position. They ain't looking for you to infiltrate what they have. You will have to do it on your own. You have to start your own. But he was like. "Forge ahead. Go ahead."

And so that's what I'm saying. Find, you know the bond where you can work together. I worked with people at Avondale. I work with people at DSA. I work with people over at McNair. Yeah, had a dance sister over there. So find that bond. You know and have relationships with these different schools. Because the relationship doesn't have to be with somebody in your school. It could be with other schools. We can't make it on our own. Whether it's with a business. It's hard. So bond together.

Tam Ivy

Black women teachers do matter, and when you're having a bad day, just always think back to your first time teaching. What made you want to go into teaching? And just be diligent and be consistent. That's it. And love yourself first. Always love yourself first.

Might not get the love in the system or the school system but love yourself first. So be diligent, consistent, and love yourself. Just go for your dreams, even if it's outside of education. Go for your dreams. You can always leave and come back. I did it plenty of times. Twice to be exact.

SJ Educate

I want you to know that you are here because you love to teach children. You're not here for your paycheck. Yes, you gonna be somebody's mom. Even though with all those things, put your wellness first. Always try to have a practice and find those ways that allow you to stay in a good space you know, and do that early on. Do that early on. Do that early on, and you're fine. Do the kind of things that allow you to be your best self. Whether that be every single weekend I need a massage or every single weekend I need to go have a piece of cake every Saturday. I've had a piece of cake that I know I shouldn't have. You know, whatever it is that's gonna put you in self-sustainability, you know. And if, if ever, at any time that things are too much recognize that. Here's that response. Take your break if you need to. You know you. You are here to teach. You are here to you know, give love to these kids every single day. But at the same time, if you don't have it to give, then what good are you doing anybody. You're gonna say you don't have it to give to yourself?

I'm thinking about what my grandmother would say.

Keep living.

Keep waking up.

5 IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Sermon

The purpose of this dissertation was to document the stories of three activist Black women teachers in order to share their knowledge and experiences and codes that enable them to maintain their wellness and commitment to the profession. For this dissertation I am defining “codes” as practices or ideas one lives by. Chapter One opened with “Devotion,” the dedicated practice of affirming our wellbeing that we experience at the start of the Black church service. This chapter asked how can we create an educational system where Black women feel that their wellbeing is supported and how can we encourage BWTs to remain committed to their professional life while honoring their personal codes of wellness? Like the church sermon that extends an invitation to find respite within the “doors of the church” community, this concluding chapter discusses the major findings and implications of this inquiry: the powerful life lessons or personal codes of Black women teachers doing the work of wellness activism as their calling, which they narrated in the stories they shared.

This research study also questioned how activist Black women teachers engage their spirits (hearts, minds, and imaginations) in their labor of love –for Black children and our people--as they negotiate various pandemics that are inflicted upon Black women in the educational profession. In my quest to understand how three activist Black women teachers’ stories offer answers to these questions I had to consider who or what fuels the pandemics that Black women relentlessly fight against in the world. I was concerned with the wellness of Black women teachers because this focus was missing from the extant research and because of my own experiences of the multiple roles they (we) must shoulder in the educational system that includes

combatting enduring racism, sexism, and many other pandemics that are associated with their (our) multiple roles and identities.

Foster (1998) researched the experiences of Black teachers who were one of the first to teach in desegregated schools and found that desegregation played a negative impact on their job security, but despite any losses they may have encountered, they understood the powerful impact that they had on their students and communities. Her work was groundbreaking in that she interviewed both rural and urban teachers across the United States and they all reported that it was through maintaining community with their fellow Black teachers that they survived during less than advantageous social changes. Just 20 years later, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2018) investigated why Black teachers are leaving education and what could make them stay. They found that issues with administration, lack of teacher support, and poor experiences in teacher preparation programs motivated teachers to leave schools and the education profession. Teachers prefer to teach and work in community with others who have a passion for the profession. This dissertation sets itself apart from such previous research in that it primarily focuses on the wellness practices of Black women teachers who consider themselves to be activists, and who take pride in teaching Black children. This study is important because these teachers are on the ground fighting, not only for their own wellness, but also for the wellness and wholeness of our Black futures and Womanist traditions always center looking at the past and present to reimagine a more just future for the world. Thus, this Africana Womanist, oral history illuminates the lives of activist Black women teachers' wellness practices past and present.

Grounded in the Africana Womanist paradigm, this research investigated and pushes back directly against the pandemics and policies that contribute to Black teacher attrition.

Research within the Africana womanist paradigm centers the experiences of Black women first

and aims to use their knowledge to improve the lives of all people (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Maparyan, 2006, 2012). Consistent with this tradition, which also recognizes that Black women are organizing geniuses in their communities, the wellness activism codes this study illuminates show that activist Black women teachers use grassroots organizing to address the needs of students and push back against damaging curriculum so that Black children can see themselves as agents in their learning who can have a sense of pride about their heritage. At the root of Africana Womanism lie Maat's principles of truth, justice, harmony, balance, order, reciprocity and propriety (Dove, 1998). In both the literature and interviews I found Black women teachers upholding and practicing these values implicitly and explicitly. This research was also conducted with those African values in mind; therefore, I do not claim researcher neutrality because from an Afrocentric standpoint this research is about our humanity as Black women-Black teachers, and our codes to maintaining wellness activism in a society that wants us to think we are wrong for loving blackness and enacting motherhood—taking care of ourselves and the children.

The implications of this research are vast and timely. This study illuminates 3 BWT wellness activism codes. These wellness codes and consequentially the spiritual strategies the Black women teachers in this study use to remain well have cultural and political implications, which are further discussed at the end of this chapter. Furthermore, this research highlights the excellence of Black teachers and showcases the power of doing research within an Afrocentric frame. In a speech at Harvard on the value of Afrocentricity, Asante, as reported in Williams (1995), stated, "If you examine phenomena concerning African people, you must give them agency. If you don't, you're imposing Eurocentrism on them." While I don't believe I can give Black women something they already have, which is agency, it is important for me to note that this research was completed with Black women and not on Black women. Chapter Four is

intentionally dominated by their voices because while theory and research helped create the backdrop of why this research is needed, the Black women are the stars, actors, and doers of this production. The wellness and wellness practices of Black women reflect their commitment to themselves and their community. While we see and hear damaging reports about the state of education and the low morale of teachers, those in this dissertation presented a zest and zeal for education despite the drawbacks and pitfalls.

King (2018) outlines a fundamental precept in using an Afrocentric research paradigm, arguing that researchers are obligated to return what we learn to the people in that it is our responsibility to assist in the repair of our “collective historical and cultural amnesia” (King, 2018, p.193). Research conducted within this paradigm is obligated to uplift African peoples; practices that “foster communal well-being, belonging, sharing, and dignity” (2018, p.194); all of these elements must be present in our work if we are to overcome injustice, inequality, and the miseducation which is perpetuated in our classrooms and policy making boardrooms. The oral histories collected in this dissertation will place Black women and their stories of survivance (Vizenor, 2008) in the archives, leaving a legacy of knowledge that future Black women and society can draw from as more pandemics arise. In the next section, I discuss the Black Woman Teacher Codes of wellness activism.

Identifying the BWT Codes

I identified the three Black Woman Teacher Codes in Figure 11, Respite, Artfulness, and Spirit, by analyzing the experiences, suggestions, and love the three BWTs who participated in this study narrated, as well as by reflecting on my own experiences. Figure 11 places these BWT Codes of wellness activism in a pyramid, along with an affirmation and a possible step we could take to bring each affirmation to life. Each code has origins in Table 2 and Table 3, found in

Chapter Four, where the themes surrounding the lives and experiences of the interviewees begin to emerge. I placed the codes in a pyramid as a nod to ancient Kemet, which our African ancestors built for eternity. That is, the pyramid alludes to our story of survivance, and the power of Black thought to thrive across millennia. I wanted to organize these codes, generated by Black women, in way that would encourage us to cherish, revere, and remember them throughout generations.

“Combat Pandemics (Stress) with Respite” is the base of the pyramid—as an essential foundation, followed by the affirmation “I take time to prioritize my wellness.” Thus, at the foundational level of the pyramid I want to show how these Black teachers are prioritizing our wellbeing as a basic need and claiming that because of the system we operate within, we have to take the time we need to resist and recover and rejuvenate ourselves. If we do not take this time we suffer. Often as Black women we must ration, steal, and borrow time for ourselves, and we are made to feel guilty about the reclamation of time for our sanity. BWT Code 1 affirms that we can only be well with rest.

The middle section of the pyramid centers on our cultural traditions and the code is “Seek Wellness in the Arts.” The data from this study indicates that Black women teachers engage their bodies, like the gut, heart, and throat with the expressive arts in order to be well. The data asks us to take into consideration where we feel emotions and consequently how we use the arts to express and release what we are feeling or experiencing. The second level of the pyramid flows from the first level in that, when we take time for ourselves, we often indulge in Black cultural traditions, including singing, dancing, and decent food. The Black women teachers in this study use the arts to combat pandemics and maintain their wellness.

The top section of the pyramid reflects our head or crown, in a spiritual sense. In *Black Women's Yoga*, Evans (2021) discusses Black women's usage of yoga throughout history not only to cope with life's pandemics but also to make our bodies and minds feel good. In yoga, the Crown Chakra is what connects us to the Creator and the Universe. Therefore, the third code to BWT wellness is "Let the Spirit Use You!" followed by the affirmation: "I welcome revival." I use the word revival intentionally to invoke the time of year that Black churches hold meetings to invite everyone in the community into the building to rededicate themselves to God. At the highest level of the BWT codes, Black women hold the Spirit that also involves community and coming together for a cause greater than themselves. They teach, not because it pays well, but because the Spirit has called them to care for Black children. The BWT Codes evoke this traditional gospel hymn by Charles Wesley (2019), "A charge to keep I have/ God to glorify... A never-dying soul to save and fit it to the sky/ To serve the present age. My calling to fulfill. . ."

This research inspires me to call for a study focused on the epistemology of wellness, meaning how do we know we are safe and met at the point of all of our needs in a Womanist understanding wellness? Respite and rejuvenation are needed in the education profession, and as a society we cannot afford to neglect the power of the Spirit in the wellness activism of Black women teachers. Through our communities we are revived and empowered gaining energy to face an outside world that does not care about anything Black. These are our codes, Respite, Artfulness, and Spirit, reminding us that wellness is a bottom-up process and that when we take care of ourselves, we take care of our community because we are interconnected as Afro-Diasporic people.

The Black Woman Teacher Codes

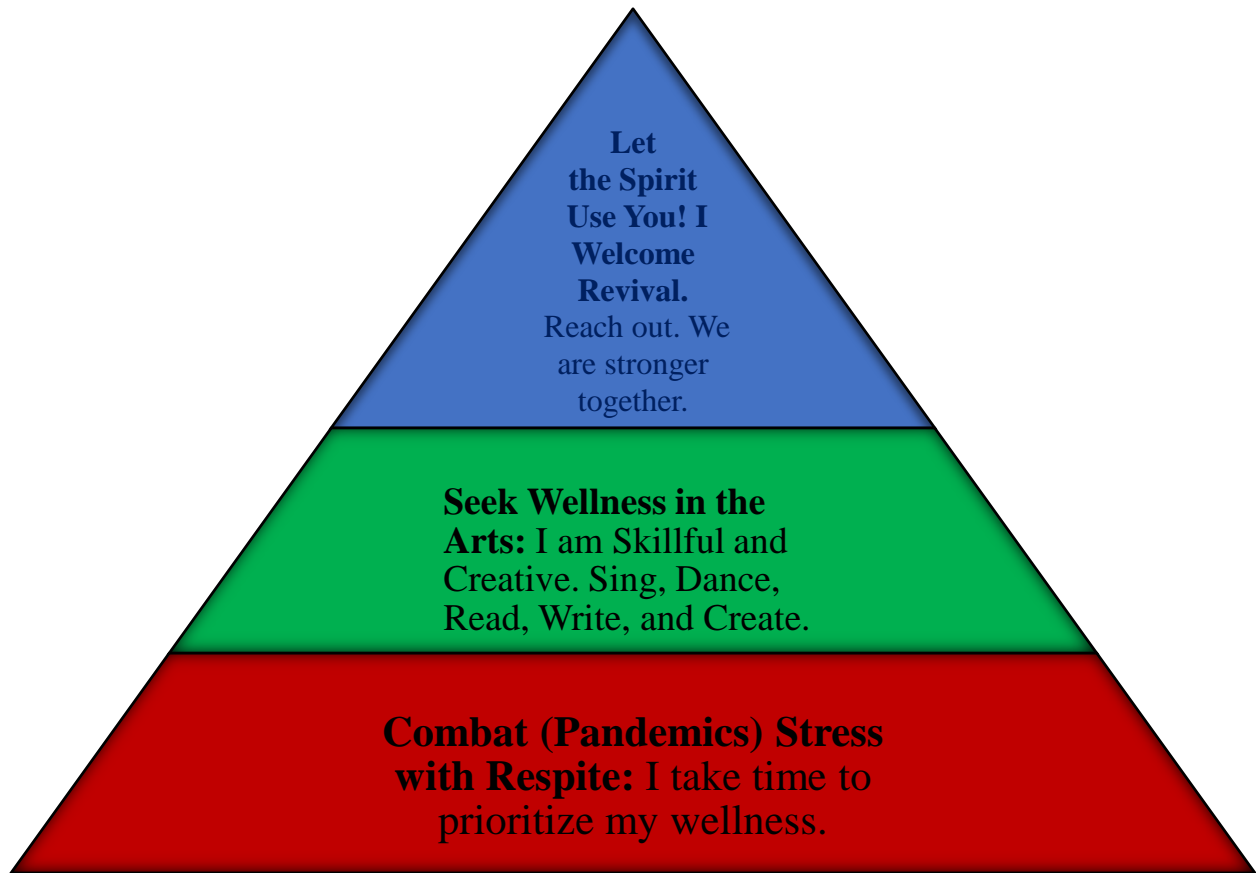


Figure 11. The BWT Codes of Wellness

Code 1: Combat Pandemics (Stress) with Respite

Black women are in danger and danger is bad for your (our) health. The United States has a long history of racism, systematic oppression, and abuse of Black people and more specifically Black women (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2002; hooks, 2014). Code 1 of the BWT Codes is “Combat Stress with Respite” by making wellness a habit. For BWT activists, wellness is directly connected to their freedom to have breaks from life’s stressors, even if only temporarily, therefore, it is the first code and foundational code. This means we must tackle our epistemologies of wellness and question how we know what we know, using the Spirit as our instrument to determine what is best for ourselves, family, and communities. Like the Black

women teachers in this study, we have to be radical with our practice of wellness, because every day in the educational system, we face microaggressions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and macroaggressions that are meant to not only kill us mentally and emotionally but also physically, spiritually, and financially.

After reading the first four chapters of this dissertation shouldn't we ask not what is wrong with teachers, but what is wrong with the education system, and why should anyone want to go to work and suffer through madness such as banning Black history in schools, censoring discussions about gender, and physical threats of violence on our K-16 campuses? Chronic stress, the lack of upward mobility allowed by teaching alone, and the responsibilities that come with being a Black woman do not disappear away when we enter our classrooms. In a 2023 American Psychological Association survey, women reported experiencing stress and feeling misunderstood about their stress at higher rates than men (Medaris, 2023b). Caldwell-Harvell, a Black woman psychologist who provides therapy to professional Black women, shared her clients' report:

the overwhelming sense of being burdened by the responsibilities of home life while trying to advance—and often just maintain a standard of excellence—in their career... Additionally, many report feeling that their male partners are not shouldering an equal share of these responsibilities, which exacerbates their frustration, stress levels, and overall well-being, significantly impacting their mental health. (Medaris, 2023b)

Finances and financial stability must be considered an integral piece of wellness for Black women and Black society. This is why I am addressing it under Code 1. Beyond stress, staying human, and having what you need without working yourself into an early grave is a key to overcoming life's pandemics, but the BWT interviewees struggled at times to honor this code.

The majority of the teaching workforce is made up of white women and though teaching for Black people has been seen as a way to practice “racial uplift” and as an entryway into the middle-class (Foster, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Anderson, 2021), the Black women in this study shared several experiences of having to take on multiple streams of income in order to supplement the poor pay that teachers receive. Black women teachers need to be creative to meet their financial needs as evidenced in Chapter Four of this dissertation. In addition to teaching, each BWT interviewed had her own business or multiple jobs to supplement their teaching salary. While other women educators can come home and rest or relax on the weekends, and enjoy family and friends, Black women teachers are taking this time to tutor, go to second jobs, and work on their businesses. Each BWT interviewed spoke extensively about the intensive labor of teaching but also how they often had to take on a second job or side hustle in order to maintain themselves financially. Living in a capitalist society makes a public good, like teaching, equate to poor pay. It is also worth noting that the Covid-19 pandemic pushed the Black community to the brink as we experienced higher rates of severe illness and risks of death due to the virus because of the prevalence of high blood pressure, diabetes, and other vulnerabilities among Black adults. While the facts concerning Black people and disproportionate effects of Covid-19 were touted on the news and media, they ignored the role that stress, and financial inequities play in contributing to these conditions. While financial wellness is at the core of why the Black women in this study engaged in extra streams of income, Black women often experience higher rates of stress than others in our community. A 2023 survey by the California Black Women's Think Tank found that out of 1,258 Black women participants, two in every five Black women are struggling to meet their basic needs because of inflation, and as a result they are suffering

from stress (Todd-Griffin, 2023). Stress affects the body, mind, body, and emotions. The APA reports that stress can manifest inside our bodies:

ongoing stress can accumulate, causing inflammation, wearing on the immune system, and overexposing the body to stress hormones like cortisol. As a result, people with chronic stress are at increased risk of a host of ailments including digestive issues, heart disease, weight gain, and stroke. (Medaris, 2023a)

Black women teachers are under chronic stress which moves from the occasional now and then heart racing situations to daily experiences with anti-Black curriculum, surveillance by administrators, and the random practice of intruder drills in the school building. Constant stress can cause high blood pressure, insomnia, brain fog, and a number of other issues which can ultimately diminish one's quality of life (Medaris, 2023a).

It is not enough to say that Black people suffered disproportionately from the pandemic, because the literature says we were fighting and resisting these pandemics way before Covid-19. Burton, as read in Evans et al. (2017) shared, "dealing with the dual oppression of racism and sexism coupled with other identities (sexual identity, class identity) can create stress and anxiety in everyday experiences" (p. 58). Ms. Davis cited experiencing an extra dimension of discrimination because she practices Islam, and the current literature on teacher attrition and retention fails to fully address the experiences of Black women who lived outwardly layered lives at work as they maintain their wellness. Our environments, and by environments, I mean the social enclosures, monetary enclosures, and physical enclosures (Sojoyner, 2016) that the white supremacists system has attempted to impose upon us, has Black women gasping and grabbing our blackness to save Black children and Black people.

What Does Respite Mean for Black Women Teachers' Wellness and Retention?

In this research study, the one thing BWTs reported wanting most was their time. In our interviews, SJ shared that she wanted time. Time for her to rest. Time for her to heal. Time for her to move her body in a way that exerted some of the pent-up pressures and stressors that the world has placed before her. She wanted time to work out and move her body because she shared sentiments similar to what Ms. Davis shared, that is, when you look good you feel good. So, while respite and rest are identified in the first level of the BWT Codes, this form of wellness activism may look different to every Black woman teacher. Though SJ's last school did not take her lunches or planning periods as Tam's and Ms. Davis's schools did, she still retreated to her car in the middle of day to get away from the overwhelming energy of the school building. The long school hours drained her, so she often found herself neglecting her wellness practices after spending nearly ten hours away from home from the time she left her house to teach and arrived back home at the end of the day. She found respite in her car throughout the school day, and it helped her stay mentally well.

Tam shared that she had to hide in her car or go sit at the security desk to get peace of mind during her mandated breaks. If she stayed in her classroom, three out of five times in a week she would be asked to cover a class for another teacher through no fault of her own. This imposition often left her feeling drained and cranky because she may not have had the opportunity to eat her food, or she only had a short amount of time to eat before she needed to get back to the job of teaching. Tam found respite in her car or by socializing with another adult in the building who did not feel the pressures associated with teaching students all day. We can alleviate the ailments encountered by BWTs by providing them with time and spaces where they can be wonderful educators without neglecting themselves. Taking a teacher's lunch, planning

period, and afterschool time must come to an end. Education has to make room for BWTs to drink water without worrying that they might have an accident on themselves because they never have a moment away from their students. The educational system must offer respite for teachers who want to do the work, and we need to fight back as educational stakeholders against the current tide of conservative policies created to prevent the teachings of Black excellence. We need to meet teachers at the point of their needs financially, so they do not need multiple jobs to take care of themselves and their families. As a civilization we need to welcome periods of rest for all humanity so that we can stop, think, and breathe and focus on where we are going as a society and the toll our children will have to pay for our journeys. This research study offers the codes to Black women teacher wellness activism in order to combat teacher attrition. These codes are to be used as a preemptive strike against the multiple hits activist Black women undoubtedly face in today's society. The next code, "Seek Wellness in the Arts," addresses some of the strategies Black women use to rejuvenate themselves and their students.

Code 2: Seek Wellness in the Arts

Much of the literature shared in Chapter Two focused on the debilitating effects of race and racism, sexism, and white supremacy on BWTs, but also focused on how we as Black people resist. Similarly, Code 1 identified Respite as the first level of resistance needed for BWT wellness. Code 2 considers our cultural forms of resistance as artfulness and highlights the creatively brilliant ways activist Black women teachers have used the arts to help them stay well and continue teaching. Across every interview, artifact, and activity the BWT interviewees shared evidence of Code 2, "Seek Wellness in the Arts," and the affirmation paired with this code is, "I am Skillful and Creative." The hearts, minds, and wellness of each BWT were often stimulated through the arts, such as theater, music, books, and even food. They used these

expressive arts to ground themselves in their wellness before, during, and after their school day. Many of the artistic examples they shared are rooted in their blackness. Each Black woman teacher reported listening to music to help them navigate their day-to-day experience. Tam enjoyed listening to gospel music, while Ms. Davis enjoyed the soundtrack from Alvin Ailey's popular musical, "Revelations."

The role of music, specifically spiritual and gospel music, cannot be underestimated as a wellness code of Black women teacher activists. The story of Black people is one of dichotomies. Joy, pain, bondage, freedom, and most of all resistance to enveloping structures that are meant to break our souls, are but some of the themes expressed in Negro spirituals during the period of enslavement and throughout our emancipation. Enslaved African Americans would sing spirituals while enduring forced labor across the South, and on one hand, the words resembled something akin to Bible scriptures, as in the song "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." As the singers are looking "over Jordan," the words carry double meanings. Spirituals were used to communicate messages to others who were working in the fields and reflect the double consciousness (DuBois, 1903) Black folk had to develop to survive in this country. Plantation owners banned the singing of certain songs out of fear of Black harmony and solidarity on any level, but as DuBois put it: "music is far more ancient than the words" (1903), which alludes to the moaning and groaning a song expresses when your mouth can no longer speak the lyrics. Black music has always been used to help us resist life's pandemics.

In the early twentieth century blues and jazz emerged with recently freed Blacks who now had the autonomy to tell their stories using instruments along with their voices. While there is much debate about when and where the blues and jazz were birthed, hence the controversy around W.C. Handy and Jellyroll Morton (Gussow, 2018) arguing over who merited the title

“Father of the Blues,” it is evident that these forms of music reflect our progression from fighting to stay human on plantation fields to struggling to maintain our wholeness in the Jim Crow era. Johnson-Reagon (2007) discusses music as something that transcends a passive act and says for the Black woman activists it becomes a tool or something they can use to improve their lives and the lives of others. She grew up singing in the church and testifies to the power of gospel music and freedom songs in the lives of Black people and shared: “I knew that [gospel] music as a part of a cultural expression that was powerful enough to take people from their conscious selves to a place where the physical and intellectual being worked in harmony with the spirit” (Johnson-Reagon, 2007, p. 2). She also goes on to discuss how jazz has a way of communicating powerful emotions without the input of vocalized lyrics. The influence of Black music cannot be neglected. From the organ player to the guitarist, musicians have an uncanny way of uniting a group of people and igniting the fire in their souls. Johnson-Reagon hits the nail on the head with her connection to music being a vehicle of the Spirit. It is impossible to be well if our spirits are unsettled, which may be one of the reasons why the BWTs in this study reported using music throughout their day.

During our interviews, Ms. Davis shared that listening to music before and after work helped her gather her thoughts or put her mind in a certain mood to transition into the next task she had to complete. She often listens to “Revelations” by the celebrated African American dance choreographer, Alvin Ailey, on her way home from school and she often watches the ballet at home because she loves the music and choreography. According to the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater website “Revelations” came from Ailey's “ 'blood memories' of his childhood in rural Texas and the Baptist Church” (Biography.com, 2021). Tam also stated that music and working out were essential pieces of what makes her whole and that going out with

friends or colleagues to jazz performances and concerts helps her stay well. SJ described using Alice Coltrane as a powerful mood stabilizer in her classroom, sharing that she would play her music every morning while her students completed their morning tasks. SJ used music daily in her classroom; she also played Bob Marley throughout the day and said she played gospel singer Shirley Caesar's music in and out of the classroom when times were really rough. Each teacher wielded music as a tool, instrument, and even as a weapon to fight back against the oppressive structures they encountered while navigating the educational system. They employed music skillfully and creatively, choosing the right tunes to receive or communicate a message not only to their hearts and minds, but also to the hearts and minds of their students and communities.

Beyond employing the art of music, the interviewees also brought in other areas of expression and cultural performance to maintain and even recalibrate their wellness at times. Ms. Davis shared that wearing bold colors, engaging in the use of aromatherapy in the classroom, and prayer help her navigate the multiple instances of hurt, disrespect, and silencing Black women teachers endure in their day-to-day lives. Tam also enjoyed aromatherapy; she would visit someone else's class to smell the scents of their humidifier as a way to calm her nerves. SJ liked to create shirts, socks, and other items digitally for her students. She would spend her evenings on Adobe Photoshop using her skills to create gifts for students during the holidays and at the end of the school year. In a recent interview with a Seattle newspaper about her work with Black teachers and Black children, Dillard maintained that schools should be a place "Where Black art and creativity are central to the curriculum and teaching because it is central to Black culture and knowing" (Jones, 2023). Art is about engaging the senses, and as Black people, our understanding of the world goes beyond what we see to include what we feel, how we feel, and even where the feelings show up in our bodies. This artfulness is a part of being Black and

existing within an African centered ontology and epistemology. Art is just one of the ways we know our world and remember our place and power within it despite what may be going on around us. BWTs use art as a wellness code, and they engage it skillfully and creatively. The final code connects Codes 1 and 2, as respite and art dance with the Spirit in order to keep activist Black women teachers well.

Code 3: Let the Spirit Use You!

Code 3 in the BWT codes is to “Let the Spirit Use You!” It is followed by the affirmation “I welcome revival.” Black women teachers must allow the Spirit, whether it be the Spirit of the Creator, the Spirit of peace, love, and joy or the Spirit of resistance, to flow through our lives and nourish our bodies, hearts, and souls. The work and labor we provide cannot always happen outside of ourselves. We must do work within ourselves not only to heal from past hurts but also to arm ourselves against future attacks on our wellness. While navigating tough times is a part of living, this code reminds us that we can bounce back from any situation and rebirth ourselves with the knowledge and wisdom of the past to guide us into a better future which is a hallmark of Womanist thought.

The literature in Chapter Two reviewed the experiences of Black woman teachers from the 19th and 20th centuries. Forten-Grimké neglected her wellness in her quest to instruct students who were on the cusp of being freed from slavery. As a result of her experiences with unwellness on the Sea Islands, she had to return home and bathe herself in the love of her family and community. Through their love and care she was revived and able to return to the classroom. Bazoline Usher wanted children and a husband but shared that by the time she looked up from teaching she believed she was too old, and life had already passed her by. She delighted in raising her niece and helping her become an educator. Loving and nurturing her niece gave her

respite and revived her spirit. Lemons, a Black activist scholar, described his upbringing as being “stereotypically white,” but as an adult he intentionally sought to ground himself in *his* work, which is recovering the Black experience in the U.S., and he did this by studying texts by Hurston, (1998), Walker, (2004), hooks (1994), and other Black women writers. As a result, he translates the Spirit of critical thinking and activism through his teachings in college classrooms. He had to retreat into the texts of Black women to heal and find respite, and only after this experience, was he able to use the spirit of their words to revive himself and assist burgeoning pedagogues on their journey into the educational profession. When we allow the Spirit, the Spirit of our Creator and ancestors, to direct our work we are transformed from being arms in a system to being agents of change in our communities.

While activist teachers are devoted to educating students through their district’s chosen curriculum, they also often take on the responsibility of educating their students about life and how to respond to the less than advantageous situations we sometimes find ourselves in as Black people living across the Diaspora. If we do not start the process of doing what our whole selves need to be well, then we will continue to masquerade unwellness to the youth and the communities we are attempting to change. The code and affirmation, “I welcome revival,” tells us that we must be open to rethinking and rededicating ourselves to our own wellness and our community’s wellness to show students what being a well, engaged, and critical-minded adult looks like.

Hooks (1994) reminds us “learning is a place where paradise can be created” maintaining that the classroom can be a space where the fight for freedom, though it may be laborious, can be cultivated. When wellness is planted in these places we can “imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress” (p. 207). The work of the activist teacher is so heavy because we are

working in a system by which white supremacy, and other systems that benefit from Black suffering, want us to forget that we can create community to lighten our loads. We must be in the habit of speaking out, reaching out, and engaging in spiritual wellness, otherwise we become distracted and caught up in the fight, not realizing systems of oppression want us off kilter. Making wellness a habit is the root at the foundation of the BWT Codes pyramid because we are the foot soldiers of the movement to educate our students. Though each person's inner work may look different than others, there will always be work of the Spirit to do, which is the highest level of the BTW Codes.

Spiritual practices and a belief in a higher power often give BWTs the energy to resist oppressive educational roadblocks and harmful structures in their daily lives. Tam said despite any issues with administration, students, or parents, it is her faith and her spirit that gave her the strength to keep on teaching. She shared that engaging in daily devotions was like an armor that she would put on to prepare her for the day, come what may. Ms. Davis spoke of similar experiences, noting that as a Muslim woman, she must engage in several prayers throughout the day. When I asked if the school supported her, she stated that she did not have a room at her last school and had to save her prayers for after work. SJ shared that while she practices African Traditional Religion, she listened to gospel songs while ill with Covid-19 to help her spirit stay strong and fight while her body was ravaged by a 105-degree temperature. She felt that in that moment all she could do was let go and give over to a higher power because she no longer had control of her physical wellness.

Motherhood as an Extension of the Spirit

BWTs often operate as second lines of defense for our students after their parents. The Black women teachers' stories demonstrated that teachers' prayers can be just as powerful as any

instruction they provide, because these prayers are bathed in a love for Black children in a westernized world that constantly communicates that they are unlovable. The love transmitted through the spirit of teachers to students has been compared to the experiences of mothers' care for their children. While conducting this research I wanted to learn more about the extent to which activist Black women teachers had experienced enacting "motherhood" while teaching and if this was a practice that interacted with their wellness. Mothering/motherhood can show up as a vehicle of the Spirit among BWTs.

As discussed in Chapter Two, motherhood refers to the deep communal bond women or men have to rearing children up in love and humanity. Motherhood is a term with many names including othermother(ing), which "consists of a series of constantly renegotiated relationships that African American women experience with one another, with Black children, with the larger African American community, and with self" (Collins, 1990, p. 176), and matricentricity or *macomère* (Fournillier, 2022), a term used in the Caribbean and other places across the African Diaspora. It can be translated as God Mother (Stewart, 2013) though it more accurately denotes a spiritual connection more than the simple name "mother." Case (1997) sees it as a responsibility to other people's children that Black women and men demonstrate and it is closely tied to an ethic of care. However, the results of this research have expanded how one defines motherhood and othermother(ing).

While I did not expect that each Black woman teacher interviewed would find herself practicing motherhood in the classroom and community, each interviewee shared that they felt like they are mothers to their students. While Ms. Davis and Tam welcomed the moniker of mother, SJ felt that motherhood is a title she struggled with. She shared that her intersecting identities as a Black queer woman who presents herself in a masculine way, did not necessarily

align in her mind with being a mother though she has a child. Despite her mixed feelings regarding motherhood, she prayed over their desks weekly and gave her roster to her mother's pastor so that he could pray over the children's desks at the beginning of every school year. Tam does not have any children but has identified certain students as being like her children throughout her career. She shared that she encourages her students to ground themselves in a higher power, often telling them that God loves them, and her actions reflect the power of the Spirit when it is welcomed into the classroom. She empowers her students to look beyond what they see and seek a deeper understanding of their life no matter the situations they may encounter. Ms. Davis spoke about working with the Black Special Education students that no one else wanted on their roster. She noted how her students grew and developed when she was able to pull them out of the classroom and give them attention in a small group setting to power their learning. When other students complained that they couldn't go with her, I immediately thought of how children want to leave with a parent any time they see them heading out of the house, if for nothing more than to be with them and experience life with them.

Motherhood at its core means more than being a bearer of children. Motherhood, the data suggest, looks like making yourself vulnerable to students and often honing into your spiritual wellness, however you personally define the word, so that you can fully engage your students and help them be well beyond the physical sense and into the metaphysical sense of wellness. While previous research (Collins, 1990, Stewart, 2013) on the topic has focused on the physical actions tied to motherhood, such as feeding, clothing, and loving other people's children, we need more research that discusses praying for, over, and with one's students. Motherhood happens when we let the Spirit use us, and through our vulnerability we not only revive ourselves, but we revive our students and communities.

Work and what I am specifically calling labor is also an aspect of motherhood. Just because the othermother is involved in the communal act of motherhood does not mean that it does not cost her something, whether that something is her personal time, mental labor, or monetary opportunities. Future research should examine to which extent teachers experience motherhood as a laborious activity. Furthermore, in conjunction with motherhood, research that considers how our intersecting identities affect how we see ourselves as BWTs in educational settings is needed.

As teachers, sometimes we get weary, as it takes labor to maintain your wellness as you are freely giving of yourself to those in your care. When we feel like the world is weighing on our shoulders we have to revert back to our source as BWTs and allow the Spirit to show up and show out in our lives. While Code 3 focuses on the Spirit and welcoming revival, it is important to note the spirit of motherhood in the lives of activist Black women teachers.

Understanding Its Function

The given definitions of motherhood neglect to address the multi-dimensional layers of love, care, and support “other” mothers extend to students in conjunction with the labor it takes to maintain one’s wellness as a teacher when you are freely giving of yourself to those in your care. The practice of motherhood must include wellness, because when the mother figure is not well, then she will not be able to sustain the pivotal role she is playing in the students’ lives. While each woman interviewed embraced her role of mother or othermother, they each reported that they were not provided enough time in the school day to utilize the strategies that not only keep them well but also bring them joy. Instead of solely focusing on the mothering part of motherhood, future research should consider how our intersecting identities affect how we see ourselves in our community. Perhaps motherhood, though the term can be used to refer to someone of any sex, is

not the best term to describe what some Black women teachers practice in the educational system. Both work and what I am specifically calling labor are aspects of motherhood. Just because the othermother is involved in the communal act of motherhood does not mean that it does not cost her something, whether that something is personal time, mental labor, or monetary opportunities.

Wellness Activism

An important aspect of my study methods was not to force a definition of activism on the interviewees. Even when they specifically asked me what I meant by the word activism, I encouraged them to define what activism is and looks like for them. Though they eventually provided me with words like change, motion, fight, and power, one out of the three participants, Tam, did not define herself as an activist though she responded to the call. I made a note in my research journal about this conundrum since it came up while interviewing, but by the end of my interview with Tam, I began to conceptualize that one can be an activist without recognizing they are involved in fighting for change. Each woman shared specific stories about situations in which they had to fight for their lives in some form or fashion to survive at their schools.

When Tam shared that she was fired from her first teaching position for defending herself, I automatically thought back to the recent incident in Georgia when a Black woman teacher was brutally attacked by a student while in her classroom and she had to be hospitalized. Tam could have easily been that woman. How are BWTs supposed to teach when they are not protected? Tam had to advocate for herself the moment she was attacked out of fear of bodily harm and possibly even death. The school did not support her actions. Her protest was met with a stance that does not support keeping teachers in the field. Tam also noted that a similar incident happened earlier in the year with a white teacher and that teacher did not receive a pink slip for

defending themselves. Declaring “I matter” is an act of activism, and one has to push back when they are being trampled or else, one accepts death.

SJ Educate and her principal also found themselves in a silent war during her third year of teaching. SJ shares how she resigned from her position because of the maltreatment that other teachers in her building received at the hand of the principal and her administrators. Though SJ was the Teacher of the Year, she resigned in the middle of the school year because she wanted the district to know that this woman was destroying the morale of a school that she loved. She mentioned that hindsight has taught her that silent protests are not the best way to get things done in the school setting and shared that her activism has evolved to include conversation with each party involved because conversations on divisive topics can heal wounds.

Ms. Davis found herself in charge of her school’s Black History program when she realized students were not being challenged with the opportunity to engage with Black history from a critical standpoint. She utilized all of her resources, including collaborating with teachers at other schools, to organize a quiz bowl and facilitate students’ learning more about Black history so they could put on a program that reflected the rich histories they were encountering in their outside studies. When the principal tried to deny Ms. Davis an African centered step group, she threatened to go to the district with news about discrimination allegations and the administration at her high school relented. She credited these activities as her ultimate motivators for teaching when her personal life was stressful. Activist Black women teachers engage in activism on a personal level, communal level, and pedagogical level, and their activism supports them in staying well.

As a result of the findings presented in Chapter Four, the idea of wellness activism emerged within this dissertation. Activism, at its root, requires action, and the stories of these

teachers in action who were willing to take a stand, even if it seemed to be an unpopular stand, for their wellness are expressed in the findings. Wellness activism exists at the intersections of the many pandemics we encounter in life as Black women and the actions we take to declare to not only ourselves but also to the world that we will not stand by and continue to be treated as less than. Just as Sojourner Truth questioned why white woman of her time experienced womanhood in a separate way than Black women, I, too, question: Ain't Tam Ivy a woman, ain't SJ Educate a woman, ain't Ms. Deborah Davis a woman? How is the educational system forcing them into activist positions? How can we as a society and educational stakeholders create a landing space where BWTs like the three interviewees feel loved, respected, and are treated with dignity in our schools? Tam's story could be one out of many Black teachers who are unjustly punished because of their race but there is little research on this topic available at the time of this dissertation study. Future research on this topic can explore the question: Does one's blackness and status as female color their experiences with school administrators and school districts?

Implications

Activist Black women teachers overcome significant challenges in maintaining their wellness practices as they navigate the educational profession. The perspectives documented in this dissertation point to the substantial physical, mental, and financial challenges activist BWTs must navigate and resist. The teachers in this dissertation research provide a mere glimpse into what it means to live as a Black woman and teach as a Black woman, while loving as a Black woman in a society that doesn't necessarily love us. By prioritizing the community and embracing their spirituality, they engaged in wellness activism, because as they work to be well the community becomes well, even if it is one student at a time. The need for considerate and

truthful scholarship that sustains African-descended people's voices is needed now more than ever.

Altar Call: Wellness Activism

Beauboeuf-LaFontant's (2002, 2005) research on Black women teachers and the womanist ethic of caring as a foundational aspect of why BWTs participate in social justice work seems to run parallel with my research on activist Black women teachers. However, while her work centers the pedagogical practices of Black women teachers, my work aims to understand how Black women teacher activists stay well despite their constant fight to challenge life's pandemics in and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, the findings from this research support the idea of wellness activism.

I am claiming that the Black women teachers who participated in this research know the value of their heritage, and through their roles as activists and teachers, they honor the legacy of the Black women educators who came before them. Black women have something to say, and their experiences can and should be used to develop policies that will support their wellness and keep them where they are needed and want to be, which is in classrooms with Black students. The Black women in this study utilized womanish ways by leaning on the Spirit; by advocating for change for their themselves and their students, each teacher leaned on community for support, and ultimately these everyday women embodied using what they have to bring about changes the Black community needs. Afrocentricity upholds the belief that everything we do is interconnected. Black women teachers must be well in every sense of the word if they are to lead a generation just like our foremothers did.

Activist Black women teachers encounter significant challenges in maintaining their wellness practices while staying in the educational profession. The perspectives documented in

this dissertation point to the substantial physical, mental, and financial challenges activist BWTs must navigate and resist. The teachers in this dissertation provided a mere glimpse into what it means to live as a Black woman, and teach as a Black woman, but also love as Black woman in a society that doesn't necessarily love us. By prioritizing the community and embracing their spirituality they engaged in wellness activism, because as they work to be well the community becomes well, even if it is at one student at a time. The need for considerate and truthful scholarship that sustains African-descended people's voices is needed now more than ever. How can we as a society and educational stakeholders create a landing space where BWTs, like the three interviewees, feel loved, respected, and are treated with dignity in our schools?

As schools of education face low enrollment numbers and struggle to recruit students, (Flaherty, 2020) research documenting the experiences of activist BWTs who maintain their wellness practices through the Spirit is sorely needed to inform teacher preparation. Future research should explore how schools can provide space for respite within their buildings. By respite I do not necessarily mean to sleep as Hersey (2022) suggests. Taking a breather to each teacher may look different, but based on this research teachers need those daily breaks in their schedule where they can be alone, if they choose, and do the things that allow them to re-ground themselves. While the topic of respite in connection with wellness were not initially considered during this dissertation, respite consistently emerged through the data. Hersey (2022) researches the power of napping as a response to capitalist demands, but this research considered the lives of 3 BWTs and the codes they used to navigate different laborious activities in and outside of the educational profession. Moving forward, I believe it is imperative to investigate how respite interacts with the wellness of activist Black women teachers who want to remain in the

educational profession. These teachers hold the codes to helping society understand how to attract and retain more Black women teachers.

Lastly, on the topic of future research, Tam's story could be one out of many Black teachers who are unjustly punished because of their race, but there is little research on this topic available at the time of this dissertation. Future research can explore the question: Does one's blackness and status as female color their experiences with school administrators and school districts? This section was an altar call, or a time where the pastor of a church calls everyone to the altar for prayer and offers the gift of salvation to anyone who feels the Spirit. I am calling every reader to join the fight of Black women teacher's and take up the mantle as activists in community with Black women. If we are to change the tide in education, we need people in all sides of the fight who are knowledgeable about the experiences of BWTs. Based on the findings of this dissertation, I suggest that we need educational policy changes at the state level.

Policy Implications

The BWT Codes should be used to create legislation and influence policies related to education. Current school policies such as the "Daily duty-free planning periods for teachers in grades six through twelve" in the state of Georgia, allow for schools to take no more than one day per week of a teachers lunch and planning period unless there are extenuating circumstances (GA HB 340, 2023). The extenuating circumstances are defined by local school administration, and while we are experiencing a teacher shortage we are constantly in a state of extenuating circumstances. According to the BLS Job Openings and Labor survey, "the ratio of hires to job openings in the education sector reached new lows as the 2021-22 school year started. It currently stands at 0.59 hires for every open position, a large decrease from 1.54 in 2010 and 1.06 in 2016" (Walker, 2022). With recent surveys suggestion that over 55% of teachers, mostly

Black and LatinX are considering a career change (2022) where does these statics leave Black women teachers?

While there are policies addressing teachers' needs, it is not enough. In fact, HB 340 acts as a piece of political theater when compared to the real and present issue of teachers leaving the field, colleges closing their schools of education, and the various pandemics Black women teachers must navigate in and outside of the classroom. I propose that a policy which directly addresses teacher attrition is needed now so that bills like HB 340 could address the wellbeing of teachers who cite no free time during school hours and burnout for the reasons they are leaving the educational field. As a result of the findings of this research there are two actions that law makers need to make immediately:

1. Law makers need to provide monetary compensation to Black descendants of slavery, Jim Crow, and redlining.
2. Teachers need to be directly involved in creating, assessing, and choosing curricular texts and deciding on the educational policies that best suit their needs.

If lawmakers address these three fundamental issues perhaps then we can turn the tide of teacher attrition and return education to the once highly regarded status it held in the past. This study presented many issues that attempted to keep BWTs from living their best lives, but it also serves as testament to what happened to them, in their pandemics, and how they developed, deviated from, and eventually reconstructed their lives to center their wellness practices. Moving forward, school districts need to have conversations about wellness before they discuss funding and money for an ever-changing curriculum. Districts need this type of information to consider how they will design the school year. As they put dates on the school calendar, they need to ask themselves, does what we have provide opportunities for Black women to be well and practice

wellness while the teach? Furthermore, a strategic conversation about the experiences of BWTs and the insights provided from these oral histories could be a wonderful start for districts who want to combat the teacher shortage. I also challenge colleges of education to insert this conversation into their strategic plans and consider the experiences presented in this dissertation as they reform teacher preparation programs and attempt to recruit the next generation into the profession.

Figure 12 further outlines steps society can take to help BWTs and engage in wellness activism. For those who are wondering what can we do to change the tide of teacher attrition you can advocate for the following: increasing teacher salaries, offer grants or money to support teachers and classrooms, advocate for teachers to be provided with time in the day to practice their wellness, uplift and advocate for wellness days, conduct further assessments on teacher wellness, address belonging and “othering” practices in schools, and use the media and social media to spread the word about BWTs and wellness. You can enter the chart at any point to make a difference. This concludes the discussion and implications section of chapter five. In the next section I will share my final conclusions as a result of this research period.

7 Phases for Teacher Wellness Activism in Homes, Communities, and Schools

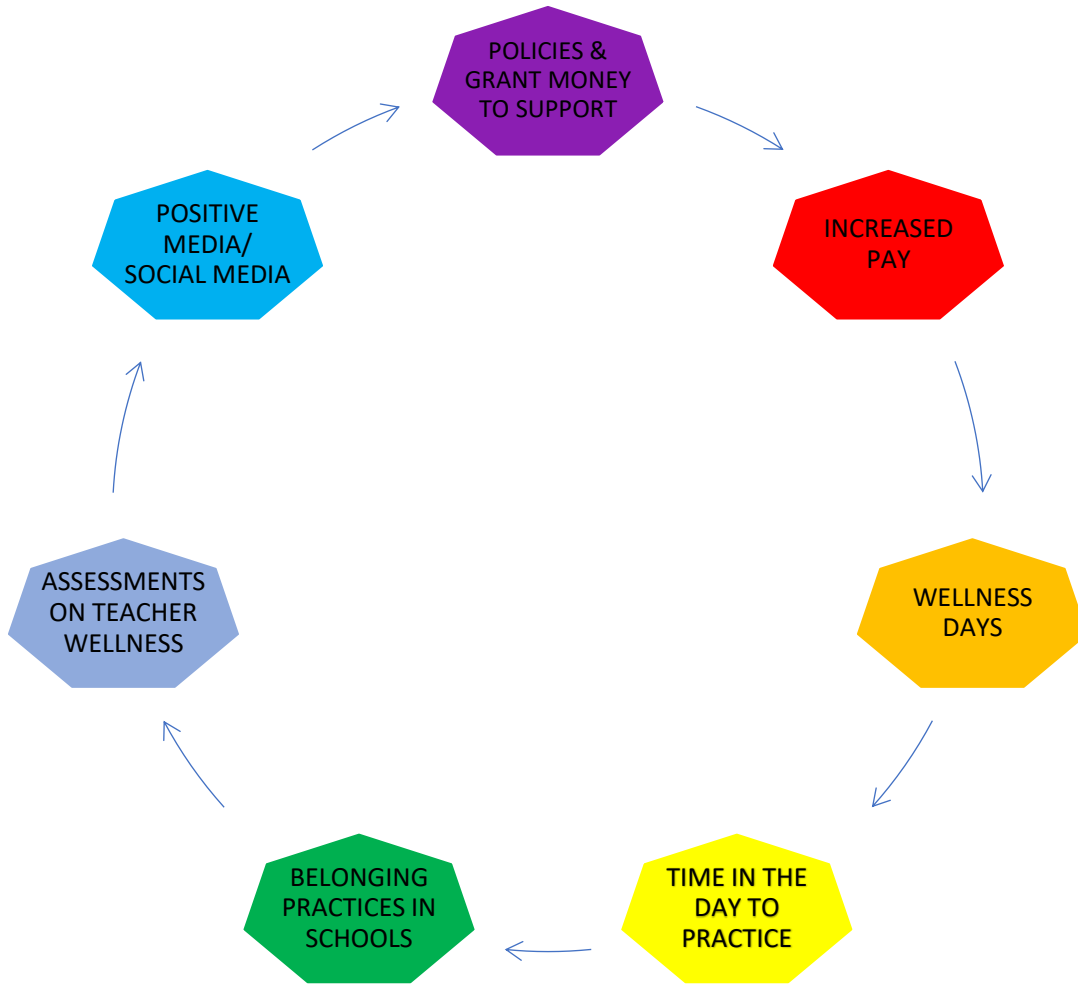


Figure 12. 7 Phases for Teacher Wellness Activism in Homes, Communities, and Schools

Benediction: The Doors Are Open

We need to ask ourselves, what’s really at stake as teachers are being fired for being culturally relevant in teaching their students? Chapter One explained what teachers are experiencing in classrooms and in the educational system across the U.S. Chapter Two focused on the literature surrounding life’s pandemics, Africana Womanism, wellness, and research on teacher attrition and retention. Chapter Three delved into how I conducted this research including theories, methods, and the methodology used to drive this work. Chapter Four provided a glimpse into the lives of three Black women teachers. The major findings from their stories included the themes of retreat, fight, labor, and spirit. Chapter Five addressed the BWT Codes

and why and how Black women engage in a multitude of techniques to combat the oppressive systems they face in and outside of the classroom. The major research question asked in this dissertation is: How do three self-identified activist Black women teachers resist the multiple forms of oppression and marginalization they face in the U.S. as they navigate their educational and professional journeys?

As demonstrated by the Hockenos quote in Chapter One, all our necks are on the line: when we do not take care of our teachers, we undermine the foundation for the future dreamers and leaders of the world. The everyday experiences of three BWTs were presented in this dissertation, and their experiences reflect an immense need for wellness support in our schools and communities. Suppression and oppression will always exist in education as long as we are under a regime where people who lack humanity dictate curriculum, budgeting, and the resources allocated to Black communities. We need policies that center wellness as a cornerstone of our education system. In true Womanist fashion, we must start by pondering what Black women need to be well; understanding our wellness would facilitate the wellness of our communities and our society as a whole (Taylor, 2017). Policies that address systematic racism and improve access to health care and healthy foods and provide space for teachers to practice their wellness in schools could possibly change the tide of teacher attrition.

Through using oral history and committing the transcripts of Deborah Davis, Tamara Ivy, and SJ Educate this research responds to the call to conduct research and produce scholarship that recognizes the ways Black people have endured, stayed well, and flourished. While we cannot forget or ignore the historical trauma inflicted upon African-descended people, our work cannot start and end here. A major aim of this dissertation was to uplift the community's ways, morals, and cultural values, or as King (2018) calls it, heritage knowledge, which contains the

keys and codes we have perpetually used to establish and maintain our humanity. Access to one's heritage knowledge/group's cultural memory and practices can help Black teachers, students, and communities to see themselves as change agents who can transform Eurocentrically distorted depictions of African Diasporic people's past, present, and future. This belief motivates me to work in solidarity with other activist Black women teachers and share our experiences with the world. I challenge readers of this dissertation to envision: How can we create a future that allows all of humanity to be well? We can start by listening to Black women.

Asé

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Black Woman Teacher Code Project

Do you identify as a Black woman?
Have you been a teacher for five or more years?
Would you define yourself as an activist?
Did you teach in a K-12 setting in the Metro Atlanta area during Covid?
Teachers of any age, if you answered yes to all of the above questions, I would like to document your experiences with practicing wellness while teaching.

Black Women Teachers, YOU are Invited to take part in a study.

Participants will be asked to:

- Complete three- one-hour interviews at a place of your choosing during the months of October and November 2022.
- Take 1-3 photos that speak to your wellness, wellness practices, and/or activism in relation to teaching along with a written description of why you took them.
- Provide thoughtful artifacts that speak to your history of teaching, wellness, and activism.

Participants will not receive any form of compensation for this study.

If you think you are eligible, please contact Danie Marshall at (404)821-9046 or email Lmarshall@student.gsu.edu. Thank you!

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

11/02/2022

Danie Marshall, Georgia State University

Black Woman Teacher Activists Wellness Interview Protocol

Date:

Time:

Place:

Interviewee:

This interview is being conducted during the Black Woman Teacher Activists Wellness Research period. I hope this will better help me understand your experiences with wellness, and how your wellness practices have assisted you in navigating the education system and staying whole during life's pandemics. You have received a consent form to sign, which indicates your consent to the interview. This interview is being audio recorded.

Questions and Probes

Thank you for joining me. Today's date is _____ and my name is Danie Marshall. This is my first interview with _____ during the BWT Code research project. How are you?

1. What is your name and where were you born? Tell me about your family origins.
 - a. Tell me about your care givers.
 - b. Any traditional family names?
 - c. What did your caregivers do for a living?
 - d. Tell me about some of your family members you are proud of.
2. Describe your childhood. What were you like as a child? What was it like for your growing up?
 - a. What are some of your fondest memories with your family.
 - a. Tell me about where you grew up.
 - b. Tell me about your most memorable vacation as a child.
 - c. How did you all get around (transportation).
 - d. Describe your community (have paper and pencil available if they want to draw to help them remember).
 - e. Where and how often did you see people from community.
 - f. What are some events you all did together?
 - g. Is there anything else you think I should know about your childhood?
3. Tell me about some stories you have heard about your ancestors.

- a. What impact has these stories had on your life?
 - b. Are there any traditions from them that you still practice? (holidays, foods, heirlooms)
4. When you hear the words religion and spirituality what comes to mind?
 - a. How did your loved ones view religion?
 - b. Tell me about your religious or spiritual practices. (Are there any you maintain from your family?)
 - c. Why do you practice these things?
 - d. How have your religious or spiritual practices evolved from childhood to now?
 - e. How might your practices influence other areas of your life? (teaching, wellness, activism, motherhood)
 - f. If I wanted to join in with your practices, what are some things I would have to learn or do?
5. What have been your experiences in understanding your identity?
 - a. When you hear the word Black what comes to mind?
 - b. How did you first become aware of your blackness. What does it mean to you?
 - c. How do you feel it has shaped your experiences? (in life, in schools)
6. When you hear the word Africa what comes to mind?
 - a. How does your conception of Africa influence your day to day life?
7. When you hear the word woman what comes to mind?
 - a. Tell me about some experiences that made you feel like a woman.
 - b. What have been some of your best experiences as a Black woman teacher? Worse?
 - c. What are your relationships like with your students? Parents? Admin? Community?
 - d. Reflecting on those experiences (relationships) how did they impact you when you first started teaching? What about now as a veteran teacher?
8. When I say the word wellness, what come to mind?
 - a. How would you describe your families wellness practices? (as a child to now)
 - b. What are some things that make you feel well?
 - c. Can you tell me about your experiences engaging in wellness? What about unwellness?
 - d. What were your wellness practices like when you first started teaching? How and why have they evolved?
 - e. What keeps you dedicated to your wellness and wellness practices?
9. Describe the entertainment you had growing up.

- a. What's the most memorable thing you remembering experiencing as a child or young person?
- b. Do you participate in social media?
- c. What platforms are you active on?
- d. What type of content do you share and why?
- e. What role does social media play in your teaching, wellness, and activism?

Thank you for speaking with me today. In our next interview we will discuss your journey through school as a student and teacher. We will also discuss your activism, wellness practices, and experiences with pandemics.

Interview Two (Go into depth about the pandemics and activism)

Thank you for joining me. Today's date is _____ and my name is Danie Marshall. This is my second interview with _____ during the BWT Codes research project. How are you after that last interview?

1. Tell me about your most memorable experiences in school as a student.
 - a. (Further probe on experiences with life's pandemics as a student and mention decades if necessary)
 - b. Do you think these experiences in school influenced who you are/why you became a teacher? Who you are today? How?
2. How did you know you wanted to be a teacher?
 - a. What got you interested?
 - b. What was your journey like through teacher prep?
3. Tell me about some of your best days as a teacher. (follow up with worse day)
4. What are some rules you live by as a teacher?
5. Tell me about your different teaching experiences which ones were you favorite
 - a. Tell me about the less than favorable experiences.
6. What were some stressful times socially you have experiences as a teacher?
 - a. How have you navigated stressful times in schools?
 - b. What are some reasons you have left or stayed at certain schools.
7. When you hear the word activism what comes to mind?
8. Why do you identify as an activist?
 - a. Tell me about your earliest memory where you were in engaged in activism.
9. In what ways, if any, do your teaching and activism intersect or overlap?

- a. What does activism in schools like for you?
- b. How do you feel when engaged in teaching and activism?
- c. How does your school or district feel about your activism?
- d. Does their feelings cause you any concern?

We are coming to the end of our interview. Reflecting on what we have discussed so far, are there are questions or themes you want to discuss concerning you wellness, spirituality, Africanity, and activism in relation to teaching and education?

I will be sure to address your questions in our third and final interview. Thank you for your time and speak with you soon.

Interview Three

Thank you for joining me. Today's date is _____ and my name is Danie Marshall. This is my third and final interview with _____ during the BWT Codes research project. How are you after that last interview?

1. Provide three words to describe your self care journey.
2. When you hear the word joy, what thoughts or ideas come to mind?
 - a. Tell me about some moments of joy you have had while teaching.
 - b. Now thinking about the past three years tell me about some experiences that brought you joy in connection to teaching. (Now the opposite)
3. In a week how often are you giving space to practice wellness at school?
 - a. How often do you make the time to practice your wellness at school?
 - b. What are some of your wellness tools? (yoga, journaling, meditation etc)
4. Tell me about your spiritual journey. How does it influence your wellness and wellness practices? When you hear the word spirit what comes to mind?
 - a. Can you tell me about your spiritual practices?
 - b. How do they manifest in your day to life and attitude?
5. Have you experienced any blockages that stop you from focusing on your wellness? What are some of the biggest blockages??
6. Can you tell me about some good experiences you have had in reference to race? Do you have any negative experiences concerning this topic?
 - a. How have these experiences influenced your activism?
 - b. How have these experiences influenced your wellness?
 - c. How have these experiences influenced your wellness practices?
 - d. How have these experienced what you do in the educational field?
7. What are you passionate about leaving a legacy in and why?

8. Can you describe the reasons why you decided to participate in an oral history study on Black women teacher activists?
 - a. What do you want future Black women teachers to know?
9. Could you please share any thoughts or feelings you have not already shared about your attitudes toward teaching, wellness, activism and living through the Pandemic.

Thank you so much for your time. I appreciate you talking with me today. I will be in contact with you to share the transcripts of our conversations. Thank you.

Georgia State University
Department of Educational Policy Studies
Informed Consent
Title: BWT Codes
Principal Investigator: Dr. Joyce King
Student Principal Investigator: Danie Marshall

I. Purpose:

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The purpose of this study is to understand the wellness and wellness practices of Black women teachers. You are welcomed to take part in this study because you are or have been a public school teacher within the past two years and have worked with students in a K-12 setting for at least 5 years. A total of three participants will be recruited for this study. This study will need one hour of your time on three separate days within November and December 2022. Participation also asks that you supply items that speak to your wellness and activism. Documents consisting of your lesson plans, curriculum, notes diaries, personal reflections or emails will also be shared.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to take part, you will supply artifacts concerning your activism in any of the following forms: lessons, photographs/videos, notes, diaries, reflections, new paper/ web reports, and or emails. You will be interviewed using a semi structured guide that will be audio recorded. You are asked to take part in an invocation activity of your choosing with the researcher. The interviews will take place at a safe location of your choosing. If you do not choose a specific place, I will choose a public library in the metro Atlanta area with quiet rooms where we can speak and keep privacy at the same time.

- Interviews will occur three times during the duration of this study for one hour each.
- The interviews will take place at a safe location of your choosing.
- The research period will be completed by December 31, 2022.

III. Future Research:

Researchers will use this data for the purpose of this research period and may use this data in the future. I may ask something in addition to clarify information offered even when this research is over. I will publish and present with this data.

IV. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life. However, we will be talking about your past and life experiences. You can visit <https://www.crisistextline.org/> or text HOME to 741741 from anywhere in the United States, anytime if you think you are emotionally upset from our conversations.

V. Benefits:

This study is not designed to help you personally. Overall, I hope to gain information about the wellness practices of Black women teacher activists who taught during the Covid-19 pandemic to add to the archival record.

VI. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

You do not have to be in this study. You may skip questions or stop taking part at any time. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may refuse to take part in the study or stop at any time, this will not cause you to lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

VII. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The following people and entities will have access to the information you provide: Joyce King (PhD) and Danie Marshall. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)). We will use your name on study records; however, you have the choice to be identified with a pseudonym for the purpose of this research. We want to protect your identity if you do not feel comfortable sharing your name. We also ask you to cover the names (black out the names on emails) if you choose to share emails that speak to your activism and wellness. If any identifiable data that I do not have consent to collect is gathered I will black out that information. Any identifiers of people who are not in the study will be redacted and not used for research. If any photographs you provide contain people who are not in the study, their faces will be blurred or redacted as well.

The information you supply will be stored in a password protected file on the secondary researcher's computer. Audio files will be kept until December 31, 2024, at which time they may be released to the Georgia State University Library Archives with your written consent. Transcriptions of the interviews will be stored in a firewall protected computer owned by the secondary researcher in a password protected file. Transcriptions may be released to the Georgia State University Library Archives with your written consent on December 31, 2024. You may still participate in this study, even if you elect to not have your interviews shared with the GSU archives. Your name or pseudonym and other facts that might point to you will appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. Interviewees will be named personally unless they opt for a pseudonym.

VIII. Contact Persons:

Contact Danie Marshall at 404-821-#### and lmarshall@student.gsu.edu if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study.

IX. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded, please sign below.

_____	_____
Printed Name of Participant	
_____	_____
Signature of Participant	Date
_____	_____
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent	Date

Appendix D: Interviews

Deborah Davis

Interview 2 part 2 with Deborah Davis in her home. The date is 2/8/2023

00:00:01

D. Davis

His mother told me. She said J really understands more than people. She said it's inside there. He just has problems getting it out. Ad I said, well, unfortunately. I have to grade him. On what he shows me. I can't grade him on what I think he can do. This is general ed now. So that's that's the only way I can agree. So I had meetings with them and his parents and and I let her show me because when he didn't finish a test, they sent the test home with him and his mother. And I said, well, I would like to observe you. So multiple choice, she says, OK J, she would read it and she read the four choices.

00:00:49

DM

OK.

00:00:50

D. Davis

And he would choose a choice. And then she said, Are you sure? When the answer was wrong, she always said, Are you sure? Now, J wasn't stupid. Yeah, he, but he did have limitations. So after that. I talked to her and I was like. If you're going to say, are you sure, you have to say are you sure after every question. I said, but he's not stupid. He isn't telling them. I said, so he he picks up on that. So he goes to another choice because he know that ain't it. Yeah. So she. She pulled him out. She had him moved out of my class. Yes, she did. She had him she had him moved out of my class and then they changed my schedule and he was in my class again. And she had him moved again. Yes, she did. She had him moved out of my class. You know. So I've had problems with not so much the African American parents or the Latino, its the Caucasian ones wanting their children or thinking their children was something that they weren't. And the African American ones, that one lady that I had a problem with, she was the one that came by and apologized and told me that she had listened outside my classroom door and she said what you're teaching him is what he needs. Thank you. But other than that, and then the one lady who was having some mental issues. Mental issues, you know, and so. Yeah, white folks. Yeah, and white teachers who were giving grades away to these kids. They didnt reflect anything that they knew. Oh yeah.

00:02:46

DM

So that kind of sounds like it rolls into when you hear the word activism, what comes to mind?

00:02:55

D. Davis

Fighting to change something? Protest it doesn't have to be island protest. You know you're involved in some type of activity to make a shift, to make a change. Or improvement.

00:03:08

DM

Do you identify as an activist?

00:03:11

D. Davis

Oh yeah.

00:03:13

DM

Would you call yourself a teacher, activist or I should say a student activist?

00:03:20

D. Davis

Oh yeah. Remember I told you I went to school in the 60s. I was in high school, 60s, so we we questioned everything and that same type of thinking. You know, I took myself to school on Saturday. To learn about African history. Nobody made me. Nobody paid me. You know, I wanted to know. I was constantly trying to change the way things were done. At least. If I couldn't change that, I'd make a suggestion, and if the department, you know, or the principal wasn't open to it then I did it within my own small little world.

00:03:59

DM

So like in your classroom or?

00:04:00

D. Davis

In my classroom with my group, you know, because I talked about things in the department meeting. Because as co-teachers. Co teachers. A lot of them didn't want to teach.

00:04:15

DM

OK.

00:04:16

D. Davis

So they're sitting back in the classroom. They they didn't do much. I was involved. I was and if it was a subject that I didn't feel comfortable enough in when I was in that class as a Co teacher, I took notes just like the kids took notes. Two reasons. Number one, if I'm a Co teacher and I'm going to eventually teach anything, I need to understand if I'm going to tutor you and help you. I need to understand it. #3. I was parroting the behavior. That you need to copy. You know, sometimes paras be lecturing I said hold a minute. Can you repeat that again? I understood it, but I knew they didn't, you know? And so I would do things like that, put ask questions that I knew they needed to ask, but they didn't ask. You know, and and I, you know, I had to deal with the the teacher they knew while I was doing it, you know? And so no. So there were little, oh gosh. There are many things that I did. Differently, how you gonna write an IEP for a student that you never met? And I would use my planning or my lunch and I would go observe that child in the classroom or pull the child out and, talk to them. Get to know them, you know. And I would talk about how, you know, that's what needed to be done. Sometimes I was being ignored, but I would do thar for myself. Yes, I would definitely.

00:05:57

DM

Do you feel like any of your activist ways showed up in your teaching, like when you actually taught the class? Were there any strategies or things you did? That you felt like was to support a certain thing in the students or?

00:06:18

D. Davis

I don't see how you could separate it. You know. Yeah, you know, I wanted to contribute to creating. Growing creative thinkers, people who thought outside the box, people who tapped into what they knew. You know, for instance, you had talked about A at some point you talked about me. Teaching something with you, showing you. A method or whatever or invocation which is OK well.

00:06:45

DM

Our invocation.

00:06:52

D. Davis

You ever see the movie Get on the Bus lately

00:06:55

DM

Yes Spike Lee Joint. Its a Spike Lee joint.

00:06:58

D. Davis

And when they're on the bus and then, you know, they "Shabooya. Sha, sha. Shabooya. Roll Call!" I use that OK in the class. I use it in language arts. For several things in language arts. I use it in history. Have I used it in math yet? But when you use it in language arts, it's poetry its rap? Is rap poetry. Oh, you got a discussion going on now. OK, so now you've got to match this rhythm. Poetry doesn't have to rhyme necessarily. So OK, what can you? I need 4 lines from you that's going to match this rhythm. So then they sit down and they come up with stuff. So, OK, now music I'm using it in music to the music. You know, (stomps 2x) you get the basic beat. Now, give me some syncopation. So there's so many ways you can use the history. You go back to the million man March and why was the numbers that were reported for that March so low. Because they didn't want you to know. That we had that many brothers. I mean, and what was it about? What was the purpose? When did it occur? You know you. You can hit that from. I haven't figured out how to do it in math yet. You know I haven't you I should say I haven't thought about it and using it in math or even in science, you know? But if you use it in science, you can talk about the spread of diseases and some pandemics. We can talk about one of the courses that I took in psychology had to do with forensics, you know, and people. Several people were coming down with this particular disease or illness, but they were in different states. What was the connection? Well, they all did a family reunion. And ate the potato salad out of this, you know. So that kind of thing you can talk about how the spread of disease or the spread of so you can use that for every subject. Kids like to make noise. You know you can't expect it to be so contained and quiet. They like to make noise, so I've encouraged them. Come on, say out you know (stomps a beat)

00:09:14

DM

Use your voice and use your body.

00:09:16

D. Davis

Get your get your rhythm going. You know, use some of these rap skills that you claim you have let me see what you what you got, what you got, you know? And and so for one of the tutoring services that I work with TBT. Tutor by teacher, you have to be a certified teacher. One of my assignments was when I was being hired. The process was to teach a class and I taught that I taught poetry to that and she was killing herself laughing and she said I use this too, you know.

She she told me that. I went on TikTok. I don't have a TikTok account, she said you go on TikTok she said they really have expanded this this rhythm when she learned it was three lines. I learned with four lines, you know, and. Quick thinking, which we did growing up those little hand games and singing games. And to a rhythm and you know, you keep the rhythm and yeah.

00:10:18

DM

Yeah, well, you know, you made me think about when when you said, you know, even teaching them about the Million Man March, that's like social justice. That's the type of stuff wasn't in the textbooks.

00:10:30

D. Davis

Ye-aah

00:10:31

DM

So you kind of looked at them and said what or what made you think I need to bring this in the classroom.

00:10:37

D. Davis

That's where that, where, where were my people? What were they doing? And when you start approaching things in that point of view, there's a whole lot of stuff going on in the in the world now. The first college I went to, I tell you, it closed down was Eisenhower College. Eisenhower College started in 1968 and I went in 69 second year of school. Named after the President Eisenhower, Eisenhower was what they called the reluctant general. He thought that if more people knew about one another, we wouldn't have all these wars. If more people understood about one another. And their backgrounds, whatever we would have all these wars and so the base of the school was world studies. If you studied 14th century art, you studied 14th century music, 14th century philosophy, 14th century literature to show how everything is connected and you know in the educational system that is not the way people are teaching.

00:11:41

DM

Why? Why do you think?

00:11:45

D. Davis

I think that. I think. You know, I think ego gets involved. I think people who really don't understand it don't want to understand it. Some people get very comfortable in their jobs and ain't trying to ruffle no feathers. You know, because it means they have to do a little bit more work. Everything is seen. I'm just hired to teach math. I'm just hired to teach science. I don't know where that came from. But no, you have to be involved. You have activism, you have to look at all of this stuff going on at the same time. And so that was unique, a unique experience that I had. Look at the world this way and look at how it's connected and interconnect. OK. So that little Spanish guy in your class, if you're talking about 1865 and he finds he came from Cuba and he finds out what's going on in 1860. Do you think he's not proud? Oh, yeah. He sees himself in the picture. Education is not about educating. Is not. We don't want the masses to be smart and knowledgeable and well informed, because if they are, could the powers that be continue doing what they do. I don't think. This is a Coinkydink as my children used to say. A Coinkydink (coincidence). I don't think this is. I think this is. My brother-in-law worked for a senator in DC for years. And the guy was telling him I aint got to worry about the whole population. I only got to worry about 3%. You know. Yeah. So, the rest of them are gonna follow along. Now aint that a blinky? The way this society is run is dependent on us being ignorant about a lot of things. And so you let little things slip through. So now blacks can go to college. Blacks can get phds. And that blacks are being in charge of this or that you let a little bit slip through, but you still got other stop gates that, because you can only. Let so many through that. So you still have other things. You know that you use racism is alive and well.

00:14:18

DM

Well, what makes you say that.

00:14:20

D. Davis

Because it is. You see it? You see it all over, and when when you're in the classroom. And it comes up. Why we got to talk about that? I mean, why can't we just forget all of that? These are black folks talking? I'm like. Wow. So now we're convinced that that is not even part of our foundation, not necessary. What is Sankofa? You know, the Sankofa bird and go back and fetch. You go back and get your history. You don't know where you come from. Well, you don't know who you are and where you're going. You know, so sometimes when I'm in the classroom, I don't remember names very well. I remember faces so, I'll say, you know, young Nubian Prince, come talk to me. He ain't no, he ain't no Prince. How do you know he's not a Prince. How do you know he's not descended from royalty from Ghana or Nigeria or whatever. Well, he don't act like no prince. Oh, you don't act like a Prince. So when you get that in your mind that that's a possibility. Now you. My daughter is 38 years old, my oldest daughter. A classmate of hers. In high school. that in the class I called young Nubian Prince. He still remembers that, and that has affected him. You know, Nubian but I tell you all shades over in Egypt. But yes the the.

00:15:51

DM

How did how do you think? Like the district felt about, you know, you teaching or did they never know? You taught things like that or even when you turned in lesson plans. Did you ever put? We were going to talk about these social issues or did you ever get pushed back?

00:16:06

D. Davis

They don't look at your lesson plans. You know you were supposed to turn your lesson plans in. And they put it in a file somewhere. And UM. They put them in a file somewhere and then at the end of semester they give them back to you. There was a para. Usually you have paraprofessionals in the school, some assigned to different classrooms, some assigned to different students, some assigned to do clerical work. So it was this guy, Mr. Sawyer and he was assigned to do clerical work, he worked with assistant principal. Most time you can find him in the library reading the newspaper. But anyway, in either case, he, you know, you turn your lesson plans in assistant principal puts them in the file and then at the end of the semester, he hands me everything in the file. So he they would give the lesson plan back and he would have a red check on them, you know. Sawyer. So, does he know you know? And so no, they're not, they just want you to turn something. In no one's really paying attention. Because the lesson is that I just was working on in 2021 when I was at MLK 2020-21. They have this elaborate form now that you have to use. Using words, not everyday words. Keep it simple. Yeah, and they put this here, this here. They put the same thing. Change the date and turn it in. So we were looking at my lesson plans and my lesson plans. I didn't make a big deal of handing in lesson plans. You know, I wrote my lesson plan for myself. And my format can fit on one page, one sheet of paper. And I wasn't trying to write all that stuff. Then they got to the point where they want you to put the standards. Well, that's that's when I was leaving. You have to put the standards that you're using. Teaching from on the board.

00:18:12

D. Davis

And has to stay on the board so that if somebody coming in your room, they can see what the heck is the difference really. Another thing for you to do, the more paperwork teachers do, the less teaching they do. You know, and like I said, they don't read the lesson plans. So even if I whatever I had in there. Because I could show you what I was doing. Because I had my book. They could care less as long as those kids weren't hanging from the ceilings and hanging out in the hall, they're not causing a riot. Now where I did garner some attention was when I was in charge of the different. Well, they knew I was a good teacher. My department knew I was a good teacher, the lead, the principal, he could walk around the school, and he knew where the good teachers were. So he knew who I was and um. Sheff didn't care, and Reid was, no, he he was interested in having so many more people that passed. The other people, a lot of people didn't care. They don't care. They did not care. You were a good teacher. OK. Move on. OK. OK. OK, move on. OK. OK. Move on. They wait till the last minute to give you your reviews, to come in

and observe you. But but they saw some of what I did. Sometimes in conversations with other teachers. And I would talk about bragging on some students, you know, and they would say, they don't do that in my class. And I said they don't? So I go back to the students I was like, I was talking to someone so and they said you don't. And they tell me we don't feel safe in those classes. People laugh at us, then they make fun of us and we don't feel comfortable.

00:20:13

DM

The community wasn't there in those classes.

00:20:17

D. Davis

And it starts from the teacher. She says she dictates it to them. You could not laugh. At someone. Derisively in my class you could not bully. How are you in a classroom and you don't, somebody who's bullying constantly and you're not aware of that. Are you sitting at your desk all the time. Oh, no. No, no, no, no. You're not looking at your students. How could that be? That's a hard one to pull off if there's something that happened once. And you didn't catch it, but it's continuous. And you don't pick up on it. Give me a break. Give me a break. So no, they weren't interested in in my activism. They saw some of it in my Black history programs. The way I conducted the black history program, the way I pulled so many people in to help with the Black History Program, they saw it in that you know and The Black History program, the format changed completely.

00:21:16

DM

And you did that at at Lakeside?

00:21:18

D. Davis

Lakeside. The format changed completely. The librarian, who used to be in charge of it, she just wanted somebody to come and tell these Black children a thing or two she aint like Black children herself. She was white. She aint like Black children herself. Not really, so the kids were excited. You had the drum line, you had the African dancers, you had some history information. The the teachers would go back and feed off of it in their classroom. Sometimes that was, you know, their choice. It was exciting. You know, when people left here, did you see so and so I had special Ed kids in the program? One of my dancers. Niada she was in the moderately severe class. And her her aunt, who she lived with, would come to rehearsals and she would videotape the rehearsals so Niada could go home and practice more. And when we perform and then afterward. Her teacher was like was that you? They didn't know. You see what I'm saying? And so how pleasing is that to Niada? Because she looked at everybody else. OK. You know when you have a program and you open the program with somebody making a speech, I use some of

the special Ed kids from the moderate class and some of the audience knew them where they came from. So they would stand up there, they say they first sentence and the crowd would start cheering. So they're yayyyyyy. Applauding them, they're supporting them. They had to practice. You know, how does that feel to you that you are part of your school community? You're contributing, you're doing something good job so and so. Good job so and so. So it was inclusive and that type of activism changing things from the way they were. To something that reflects, and it was student driven. This this was run by a committee. You know the black history club. When we started meeting with them, we recognized these kids don't know anything about black history. So I said OK. Mr. F, that was a we did it together. A Co-sponsor, I said one of the best ways and quickest ways to get them to learn. Let's put them in a competition like Black history quiz bowl. OK, because my children had done it before. You look at their school. There was no black history quiz bowl for high school. Elementary and middle, but not high. OK, let's do it. So we sponsored it, OK. We got those little jeopardy buzzers that the debate team use. So the club we prepared the year before, they had to come up with 10 or 15 questions and answers. Which means they had to do research.

00:24:28

DM

You learn it.

00:24:34

D. Davis

And so. Um. Yeah, yeah.

00:24:38

DM

You snuck it in. They weren't ready.

00:24:40

D. Davis

Oh yes, you have. You had to find an application fee to join and we offered it was a monetary prize, and people were excited about it and then they told us we couldn't do that anymore. Couldn't give money as a prizes.

00:25:00

DM

Oh, oh, you couldn't give money, but you can still do the the Black History.

00:25:04

D. Davis

Yeah, but we that was a lot of work. That was a way and we had other schools coming. See the Muslim school came. Oh yes. We had other schools. We invited schools to come. I went to Dekalb county, they have a television station

00:25:24

DM

Like a closed circuit thing. Or public access like.

00:25:32

D. Davis

Well, I want to. I wanted to be over the news. Yeah, I guess closed circuit, because they would have some information that you could put on the news in all the schools in Dekalb County. So I wanted them to come out. And you know, talk about that.

00:25:46

DM

They didn't come?

00:25:48

D. Davis

For the Black history program, I had friends in different schools, so one year Avondale High School. We got together, the doctors and director there and we came up with the choreography. So we taught the same choreography they did it for their black history program and we came over and did it with them and they came over and did

00:26:08

DM

So it was really big, it looked really.

00:26:09

D. Davis

Yes. DSA. Dekalb School of the Arts. Their Black history program wasn't just a day program, it was a play. It was an evening production, and so they learned to, they learned the professionalism of being and, you know, having your tech week, having your rehearsals, having your parents told me my child would have never gotten this experience, if they had not been with this. So I wanted, rather than youth trying to show or put on different schools that have rivals. We're not rivaling working together do something together. They wouldnt cover it. They wouldn't cover it.

00:26:54

DM

OK. Well, we're getting closer to our at the end of our time together. So I want to. Move us into. Interview three and and it starts off with. Can you provide 3 words to describe your self-care journey?

00:27:17

D. Davis

Girl, I've read this too, and that's so I gotta think about that and then didn't go back and. My self-care journey.

00:27:30

DM

Umhm. 3 words.

00:27:31

D. Davis

Prayer. Im thinking information, but I don't want to. Being aware. If I get it, an illness or something I'm gonna do some research and find out what that really is. And then I go talk to the doctor. So I'm not sure what word to use for that. I know it. Also, they're definitely being aware, so we're talking about my self-care journey, prayer, being aware, persevere.

00:28:29

DM

Prayer, being aware and persevere?

00:28:34

D. Davis

Im a poet, and I didn't even know. Because when I think of yeah. You know, we persevere through the hard times. Which makes the trial. You dont pray for the trial to go away when you're going through trial, and you will go through the trial. You pray that you have the strength to make it because the next time that comes (snaps) then you handle it like that for sure, because you've already been there. And that actually, was the symbol for my African dance group. The Ghanian term was Aya. The fern, the fern was the symbol.

00:29:13

DM

I like Adinkra symbols.

00:29:14

D. Davis

Yes, I taught them in school too. I used them and that was the symbol for the African dance group at Lakeside. So the. And yeah, we talked about Adinkra symbols a lot, too. Yep. Yep, Yep, Yep.

00:29:29

DM

So thinking about the past three years, because you went back to teach. Right before the pandemic start? You went back in

00:29:36

D. Davis

Like in January of 2020.

00:29:38

DM

You went back to teach and you went back to help. Were you tutoring you, went back inside?

00:29:14

D. Davis

I was at MLK, I was doing job share for special Ed. I was special Ed. Sure, in MLK. So listen, I'm on. The black side of town now.

00:29:52

DM

Yes, January 2020, and then March 2020.

00:30:00

D. Davis

So we had to be virtual.

00:30:02

DM

Uh-huh. How was it before you went virtual? How was it being back in the building? Because I think you said you retired in 2012.

00:30:07

D. Davis

Yes. Um. I love school. I love school buildings, but I looked at what they were doing, and said this is a mess, you know, the the

00:30:19

DM

Just those three months, you saw it. (laughs) Real quick, the look on your face!

00:30:24

D. Davis

You know it don't take three months, but but yeah, then you can see what an organization is not well seasoned. Not well run. Excuse me. When I first came. And the assistant, one of the assistant principals, came down to you introduce herself and she said I'm going to take you back to meet the principal. And he walked in and he had a flat affect. And no, nothing. And then she came back and said well, we'll have to meet him another day and. I'm like, OK, you know, I mean, so all of that leaves an impression. And so she took me up to the lead teacher and talked with her for a very short period of time, moved me right into the department head. And and I observed the department head for a while. Was in her classes with her? Find come to find out that MLK, that administration did not like special Ed.

00:31:26

D. Davis

A lot of people, they bring our test scores down. Because they insist the special ed students to take the test. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, they got test scores down and they don't want to do nothing anyway. And because you have some behavior. So the department head couldn't get the support she needed to do some things. The lead teacher it used to be the lead teacher but the lead teacher was assigned to several schools. And now they got more paperwork to do. Yeah, we all got more paperwork to do. Ain't no teaching going on. They told me that they had a manual. For me to use. Through I never saw that manual. They couldn't find it. Then she said she need to just recreate it. Never happened, yeah. Never happened. UM. So here I am. I'm thrown in. Now I got a sink or swim. I ain't going to sink. That ain't my nature, but I'm thrown in, and you know, if you have any questions, OK, I'm coming to your with questions and you ain't giving answers or you just blowing me off to somebody else. I didn't have a place to be. Usually, if you have teachers, there's a if you don't have your own room. Then there's a teacher work room or something, special ed where you can go and you have a desk at least it took forever...

For me to get a key to the room. So when I came in, I would end up going to the department heads room trying to leave my things there, then go back over here, then go back over there. It was just so unwelcoming you don't have a place for me. I got to carry everything, roll everything around because you don't have a place. Finally, I went to get a key, the assistant principals way on the other side of the school club. So I go over to get a key. Oh I don't have keys to that. And

then he said, well, this is the key I got. So you try them out and see which works. I'm a Co teacher. I have to go into several classrooms throughout the day. Finally I got a key. But that was right, that wasn't when I first came in January, I got a key right before we left in March.

00:33:46

DM

How did that experience make you feel? Just even thinking about not having a place and knowing you needed a space?

00:33:52

D. Davis

Then it made me feel as if I truly was not welcome, not as a teacher. I was welcomed as a body to fill in a space, but not up here. They weren't interested in that up here.

00:34:02

DM

Not for your mind. And what you had to teach the students.

00:34:05

D. Davis

And so and the fact that they put me in classrooms where it wasn't my forte, and so I know the department head was trying to they had a new person, they were hiring and he's a coach and they were trying to give him the math class because that was his background. Let me go in the other one. In the history class I have a ball. Yeah, yeah. I had an absolute ball. The history teacher was. A very, very. Very good teacher, young man, energetic, enthusiastic.

00:34:36

DM

I think I know him.

00:34:37

D. Davis

But his expectations were not quite what I thought they should be, but in either case. We we did well together. I liked him. And we had some problems with a student who thought he was all that like it. Black thought he was all that and a bag of chips. And so I had to. I asked the teacher. I said I'd like to address the class just for a few minutes. And I addressed the class and talk about some of my background. I'm not in here, a knot on the wall. You know, and if because I graded a little harder than he did, you know, and she and she didn't. And I'm like. You know, if you want to come and talk to me about something. I'm reasonable, you know, but he just. The student was

very dismissive and I tell him I said the one to get the highest grades in the class doesn't mean. Hes the smartest, and everybody stopped and looked.

You know, I said. And you pride up yourself. He had attitude and he the teacher had him apologize to me and he. I'm sorry. I said I don't accept that. He mumbling why he was walking out so, but the teacher was a good teacher. Kids could come see him during his lunch. They could come, you know, he didn't let them. Hang out there, he said no, you need to be in class but he told them he loved them. He was enthusiastic. He it was a good class. I liked that class. Yeah, I really did. The other class I was in was a science class. That teacher sat on his behind his. Actually, his name was Niati too. He taught environmental science. He never left his seat. He gave them book work. He typed. He looked at the textbook. And he typed. Titles and subtitles and questions that went with. That's it. So in order for you to get the answer, you look into the book.

00:36:42

DM

Do you feel like the students were learning?

00:36:47

D. Davis

No, they weren't learning. They weren't learning, they were learning how to just fill in the blank. Finding that same sentence here, but they weren't learning. He would throw things he would. He was. And when I came in the class, there was no place that was set up for me. So initially I sat near him at the lab desk. Keep working on this PhD. You know, so finally I went in the back, you know, and set up my little office area and I would talk to kids, you know, why are you fooling around? Why you're not doing your work? And that was the right when the pandemic came out, hints of it. The kids say Oh, black folks can't get it. He was absent one day, black folks can't get it. I saw that on YouTube I saw. That on.

00:37:36

D.M

They can't get what?

00:37:37

D. Davis

Black folks can't can't get. COVID, I said.

00:37:39

DM

Oh, that's what the science teacher said?

00:37:40

D. Davis

I said, really. That was the students. Not the science teacher. Students. He was absent that day and I like discussion. You can learn a lot from students with discussion, not enough of us listen to student. So they feel they have a place where they can say something, OK? And I said so. You think Black folks can't get it? No, we haven't heard any case on TV about black folks that have it. And I said so you think because you haven't heard that means none have got it? And it has something to do with the melanin. You know, because we have melanin in our skin and you know, so we got information. Um Internet? And you believe everything that you see? I'm using the Socratic method hopefully that I can bring them back around sometimes they're too far gone. You just got to come and tell them, OK, let's talk about this COVID. Virus. You think the virus says, Oh your skin is darker, I ain't going over there, you know. And then you got the picture of the virus that looks like a little rocket ship landing. That's you know penetrating the skin and I'm like let's think about this. You know, and so but that that type of. Ignorance or the type of way they talk to each other when they're yelling and they're cussing and and calling you the B word. I'm like. Oh, you just step aside for a minute and they, why you got a attitude? The how when we talk, we talk to each other like that all the time. Really? Well, please refrain from doing that. In this class. You know I can't control you when you're. Somewhere else but.

00:39:19

DM

So what was it like going online cause by March?

00:39:21

D. Davis

Going online was scary for me.

00:39:25

DM

Or tell me about the day you found out that. You are at school, I'm assuming, or you tell me. And then they say we're not coming next week. What was that day like? Do you remember that day? It's like March 2020.

00:39:42

D. Davis

March 202. Yeah, rumors had been going around that then we're going to switch and make it virtual. So I heard my department head other teachers, you know, and it didn't scare me then. When I got home and then you have to sign on and this and then, then I'm like, OK. But see the white using the whiteboard I left Lakeside right before they started there. They brought

whiteboards in. I wasn't using them. And by then I didn't have my own classroom. You know, so I was. I didn't have a whiteboard, you know, to practice on or even to use. I didn't have to use it.

00:40:20

DM

By whiteboard. You mean, like the the electronic board? Like the Promethean board

00:40:28

D. Davis

Yeah, like the Promethean board, they're all kind of, yeah. Yes, yes, yes, yes. I'm sorry, Promethean board. I'm regular chalk on the black board, or marker on a white board. So, now I'm having to learn a lot of stuff now. They did have some learning module. That we could go to to learn how to do this step one Step 2. But sometimes the people who write them, they're not user friendly and they're assuming that you have a certain amount of knowledge when you come to my generation, you can't make that assumption because we don't have a certain amount of knowledge. This is a whole new ball game for us and just like in Philadelphia story, when Denzel Washington was the, he would say, break it down, explain it to me like I'm a four years old, that's what we needed. And these are teachers who are writing these. Not very good. So things my generation, we're afraid to hit buttons. We didn't want to erase that. Yeah. So. Yeah, there was no come in for training. There was no one-on-one Microsoft Teams training. Virtually it was follow these instructions and I would call my department head and she because she was well versed in the computers she would walk through some things with me and say, are you doing this? You should see this, you should see that but I couldn't call her for everything all the time she had, she was department head plus she had classes to teach. You know, she had she had a full load and so yeah. So it it was. Not it was not preparation for us.

00:42:07

DM

Were you observed? During that time.

00:42:12

D. Davis

No. I was supposed to have been observed, before the semester was over. But if I was observed virtually I don't know because you know when you're on Microsoft Teams, people have permission to come in a room and they can come in and you don't even know that if you're not paying attention if you don't have the participant link opened up. You can't see who comes in and goes out and. I had a run in with an African American math teacher. Very rusk. Very matter of fact. Well, he had his stuff. I had a male math teacher that I worked with when we were when I first started and then when I started again in August had another male math teacher. And uhm. The first one. This all these reports were done on time. He's gonna teach this stuff. Kids in the back listening to the music and playing around and fool around, he left him alone. You know, as

a teacher, that doesn't sit well. So sometimes I would go and pull up a chair and. Sit right in the middle of the them. They surprised we she doing back here? I say I want to ask you a question I said. Now you know nobody cant make you do anything sometimes. We can make it uncomfortable. We can't make you. And it's OK, OK. I'm moving around the classroom, helping different people. I just want to know. I don't wanna bother yall. But I want to know, do you want some help? Or do you want to continue? Sometimes they say we're good. Ok

00:44:03

DM

And this is before the pandemic.

00:44:07

D. Davis

This is before the pandemic in the classroom so he would not. He was so focused on them doing, showing that they did some of the work. That assignments had some kind of grade, that there were assignments they were supposed to do on. He would send me with some of them to the computer lab. He was just getting them out of there his hair. And I wasn't going to be in the computer lab and be a a bouncer, so I had them sit at the computers. Where I can see what was on this screen. And tell them that so many strikes and you out of here. I sent them back to him and then I ended up going back to him before the period was over, you know? And he he never complained or. Anything. But I'm not going to say what am I going to standing there arguing with you. Yeah, you know. He he didn't. He just wanted to say that he gave him the assignment and. Just check it off. If a student needed help, they could come up to his desk. If you need to work with him. He would do that. But he was this man was a personal trainer. He was a personal trainer, telling you you gotta hustle when you're a teacher. He was a personal trainer. So, he came early and stayed after because he had some clients that were teachers, right there in the gym. He provided meals, he cooked. He showed me some pictures on this counter. All these little containers spread out. Good meals. So he cooked he had a food service company, so he sold those. He had candy and junk food that he sold to students. Now you're not supposed to do that unless you're selling an MLK. At Lakeside they stopped even doing that all together, and MLK the only way you do that is if you're supporting club. The department told me. I ain't never know. He ain't associated with the club. He did his regular periods and during his planning he taught a period because they were short a teacher. Extended day.

00:46:20

DM

Wow. So yeah, he was. He might have been. A bit tired, he might have. Been tired.

00:46:28

D. Davis

Healthy in good shape. But what was his focus? His focus was on getting the report done, get a report done. Not I got this student over there and he really doesn't understand. You know he's not working. Why is the student back there listening to music rather than work. So I got to talk to some of the students you know. Whats going on? You know? And so. Yeah, no, that so MLK was A and Lakeside was a disappointment too after a while. You know in. More ways after a while than it was initially. No place is going to be. Perfect. But MLK was a. That black on black hate. With this like this. It was a bit much to take. And I had a student whose Chromebook wasn't working, so he I sent him down to the office and he came back and he was his face and I'm like, what's going on? What's wrong? He said. But did they give? You another one? No. You know, I said well did you ask and he say Yep. And I said what happened and the other guy had gone with him and said, and I even reminded him to take his hat off when he was talking to the guy because when he asked for another Chromebook, the guy said are you stupid or what? I've already told you. And like I say, I was there in January and didn't get keys till March. You know, I went to the custodian, I said now you know, you hear? Custodian, I said I introduce myself. Said you know, you know everything. With everything they do. I said I need some keys. He said. I said they said. There was only one person that was making keys for DeKalb County schools. And you had to wait.

00:48:23

DM

It's like what 2-3 hundred schools in Dekalb County!

00:48:27

D. Davis

So no, I can see I can see right away that it was not run well.

00:48:35

DM

Because you had stayed from 2000 to 2012 at Lakeside. And so you had retired from Lakeside and then you came back January 2020. And then how long did you stay at uh? In Lithonia. Teaching at MLK?

00:48:47

D. Davis

I left in February 21. I I finished. I did the semester from January to May. And then I was trying to find another job share for August. But that school was not offering it again. They had three jobs, shared teams. They wanted to put their money somewhere and they were not offering. And so I ended up becoming full time specialist teacher in August 2020. And then I left and at MLK. The the thing about the job share. Beautiful concept, but just not run well. So what can you say? You can say I offered this. You know, I offered it and nobody came. And the same thing with orientation. In August, there was no orientation to show me how to do those software platforms.

00:49:57

DM

So thinking about teaching during the pandemic, was there anything that brought you joy?

00:50:08

D. Davis

This reminds me of another question you asked me when you asked me who I was proud of in my family and of course, my 4 girls. And that goes without saying to me not to you maybe. But I tell you my my my siblings, my brother and my 4 girls and a couple of cousins and I have to say that there were certain parts, times of their life. They did things that I was proud of, but anyway. So now Joy, Joy doing the pandemic?

00:50:32

DM

Yeah, working with the students or as a teacher and with yourself, was there any moment during where you felt joy or any experiences that brought you joy in connection to teaching? Because you were virtual even when you all went back in August?

00:50:48

D. Davis

Yes, yes. There was one math teacher that I worked with that she made the effort to include me. So I had a double screen the double screen I don't have it up now, but I kept tabs on who answered. And I would choose sometimes the next person to answer the question. Or I would give an example. I would give my input and she welcomed that. The other math teachers that I had. V Doctor. Was her name. She she would say something every now and then, but she really wasn't very inclusive. Her way of taking attendance was to ask you she did an SEL activity and attendance at the same time, so she would ask you a question. What's your favorite ice cream? And the students in her class talked more. That introduction. That was the motivation to get them used to talking and saying things. OK? She asked me to come with some questions because she was running out and I came up, but she said not questions that have a lot of deep discussion. Just mostly yes or no. And I came up with some she never used them. Sometimes she I I thought she forgot I was there, but then sometimes she would say, Miss Davis, I would like to to set him a breakout room. And would you take so and So and then with them and that's what I would do so I felt. You know. I felt used. I felt that I was being used and for good in positive way. The man that I had. He was a pure, pure donkey. He he was wanna get his reports in on time. That's all. You know, and then these people got praised for this by the principal when we have meetings and we mister so and so. So and so, you know, they report. You know, they would that you check off X Teacher, because your report is on time, give me a break. You know, give me a break. So in either case, that was just. That's disheartening that you the principal, that's what you see as success and this guy, he was cold, so cold. And you know, he would show me something,

but he showed real quick. And then he moving on because he got to get his papers done. Grades in. My job was to set up a separate channel to provide tutoring. The tutoring was for special Ed students, but anybody wanted to come to come. But tutoring some of our special that was in their IEP. So when I told him that and he was saying, well, how could, are you ready to teach the subject? And I said no. He's on. How could you set up tutoring. And you can't teach the subject. I said, don't you have other classmates that tutor students? They're not qualified teachers in that. And I just think, well, I don't. Well, wait a minute. Let me. Don't open up the channel yet. Wait for me to tell you. Wait, wait, wait for me. So I went back and report it to my lead teacher and my department head. They were like no. Open it.

I open the channel and then I let him know and see what I was talking to him through e-mail. He got defensive because he thought I was trying to establish a paper trail to report him. I aint trying, this is what I do with everybody and you know so. So that's the first thing that ticked him off. The second thing to tick him off is that I set up that channel without getting permission from him. I tell him thats my supervisor. I'm working with you. I don't work for you. Them. So he was mad now remind me of Carlton Bailey the guy down at FAMU. Because you know what I said or did hurt your little feelings, and so he. The tutoring every now and then I had two students who came to the tutoring but, it was not pushed through any of the teachers. Not really. They may have mentioned, but not really pushed, because if you were doing tutoring you can mention it and then the next day said OK, so check with me who attended tutoring. Did they do well? Oh, yeah, I heard you did. So and so that was really well and nothing. So you didn't have that kind of? You know, so I was just hanging out there and I would have the hours you know but. People didn't come. They didn't come very often, and he even made a statement. Ms. Davis is offering tutoring. This is Mis Davis. This is not me. This is Mis Davis. And I was like the heck does that mean? Well, I knew what it meant, and so I never had anybody from his class. Come to any any tutoring sessions, not ever.

00:56:03

DM

So that kind of sounds like unwellness like that was not a space. For you to.

00:56:08

D. Davis

No. The only class I enjoyed was that history. What was that man's name? Was that history class? And because I had been surrounded by so much black history, because I had studied so much black history, I could speak to a lot of things and he gave me free rein to share information with the students. And one guy asked me something. How you know so much. So and so. Yeah, but he was the only one. UM. But even then they were he was using the Cornell method, he said. It was the Cornell method. It was a very abbreviated Cornell method. You know, I'm taking notes and I'm like, this is so so this is you know, so he made a lot of things easy for them too. And I'm saying some things, yeah, but we got to challenge them. It's OK to want them to succeed, so you can say good job because that's going to motivate them, but you also got to you

got to balance that with not just having low expectations. So he he got more participation with the students doing his work.

00:57:24

DM

What were some Wellness tools like? Were you given places to pray at school, or did you have a space to to?

00:57:30

D. Davis

Oh, girl. No, I didn't even ask for that.

00:57:35

DM

Because that's a part of your spiritual practice, correct?

00:57:38

D. Davis

Right. We end up, we end up in a situation where we have to make up our prayers when we come home. OK, you know, but I didn't fight for that or ask for that. I know some schools did have something like that. But you not only is it a place, but you have to have where you can get away. If you're the only teacher in the room. You can't get away You know, sometimes it's crucial. You know, and so.

00:58:00

DM

So they don't make room for that, and that's part of your Wellness.

00:50:04

D. Davis

You know, I didn't ask for room. But I don't know if they would have made it if I asked. Or if they would have fought against. You know, I just got to the point where I accept. Accept that that's not always. Some students in some schools, they they had it. The students spoke up for it. I think DSA had it when they were over over on N. Druid Hills and students spoke for it and they gave them a space. Spellman had it. You know. But yeah, there was.

00:58:43

DM

What are some of your Wellness tools? What are some of your Wellness tools like? Do you yoga or journal meditate? Just any tools you use to stay well? Read?

00:58:56

D. Davis

I don't meditate well, I guess I meditate. But you know all of that when you sit and you've got in the center and you sit and think, yes. Sometimes when I got to school, I would sit in the car. And I would think or sometime before I drove off to go home. I was sitting back. I don't like going to the teachers lunchroom to eat lunch. You tend to hear all the horror stories about students. I don't want to hear your Horror Story. I want to inform, I want to have my own opinion. I don't mind getting information from you, but I don't want your bias to be the driving force so you know, at Lakeside, I occasionally ate with the teacher teachers, ate on the stage in the lunchroom, you know? And I'm. Caroline A, the department head. When I first came, she was saying that you need to eat lunch with the teachers. I was like why? She said, because, you know you don't eat with them then they think you don't like them and you know. Yore teacher of the year and all those other kind of stuff. You know, no, I didn't. But see, when we were in our orientation, we had a workshop. The Dekalb county orientation saying don't eat in the teachers lunch room. And they were talking about why. I said that makes sense.

01:00:26

DM

Yeah, yeah, I got the same thing.

01:00:16

D. Davis

So yeah. I may have gone two or three times, but other than that I don't. Yeah, but no, there was, yeah. I didn't ask for a place, to pray at MLK.

01:00:43

DM

Well, thinking about your spiritual journey. How does it influence your Wellness and Wellness practices?

01:00:54

D. Davis

It's a major influence. Because in Islam, which the word means peace. I find peace. Any issue that you have. You can find an answer, bible, Torah, Quran. Because the Creators prophecy is the same. The message is the same with all the prophets and so. Sometimes, especially during Ramadan, I would be listening to the Quran on tape you have to do something. At that time I thought you had to read so many pages per day. I found out that it's not the case. I love Alvin

Ailey. And we would go see the show every year. And I like Revelations. I like the music and revelations. Now, are you familiar with that? OK, one of the songs is Wade in the Water. Sinner Man, you know this ballet. He wrote his momma was big in the church. He was raised up in the church. This ballet, this group of dances and songs are from that and a lot of times that I would play that tape to put myself in a certain mood. OK. There was another. African, African singer I'd play that tape. You know to put myself in a certain mood.

01:02:27

DM

So is it music or is it music and dance. It's like theater?

01:02:36

D. Davis

Some of it was music. And then on the way home I would play the oldies. See, I can sing along and that helps release some of that tension because you're going home and you're in traffic and, you know.

01:02:47

DM

Coming home from school.

01:02:49

D. Davis

Yes. Coming home from school. So I would play the oldies. You know, I like music.

01:02:53

DM

Like temptations or?

01:02:55

D. Davis

Oh, yeah. Four Tops. Sing Martha. The Marvelettes. And you know, Otis Redding and, you know, some of the oldies that my mom listened to, she would listen to Arthur Prysock and just, you know, just those. And that would help. To keep me calm. You know, and I usually didn't listen. I listened to something. That was upbeat on the way.

01:03:18

DM

Like what?

01:03:20

D. Davis

Like I said, revelations. Yeah.

01:03:23

DM

Oh, you said that going to school. You listen to like revelation

01:03:26

D. Davis

Yeah, revelations and. Sometimes oldies but goodies, but more, going home.

01:03:35

DM

What do you think the upbeat did for you on on the drive there?

01:03:38

D. Davis

Oh gosh, it got you in the mood, so to speak. It helped you. Whatever little white cloud, I don't say black cloud, little white cloud that was hanging over your head, you know you can push that away to focus. It doesn't make it go away permanently, but move that clear me. Clear that away from me. I love music. That's a song, by the O'Jays. And I've and I've always loved music. And there's an uncanny connection I have with music, I think, because sometimes even if I'm hearing a piece, I haven't heard before. I know where you're going. With your next bar. So I sang, I sang in Glee clubs. When I was young. My goodness in junior high school, we were. We were in an enigma. This is a college. I mean, this is a Harlem school and we sing in Beethoven, Beethoven and Bach and Hayden and Hannah and Middleton. And we traveled all over New York City, performing on TV. Oh yeah. And the school was, I live on this side of the street, the school was on that side of the street, I live on the 4th floor. And my mother told me sometimes when we were rehearsing, they could hear us singing, you know, and this was a this was probably over 100 kids in this Glee club. And the director was African American and strict. She aint play. We sang at the World's Fair. You know she didn't play. She did not play, so yes. Those are things. The colors that I wear, I wear red or yellow or bright orange on my head. And you know those little kids. Right. Why you got that rag on your head?

I say, Hold on. We have to have a fireside chat. Close the door. Other kids like oh man, she wears it. It's called a Gele. It's not a rag, it's from Africa. And they they start teaching it. But I was telling them colors help to brighten and lighten your mood. You know, it's not so much what somebody else thinks looks good. It's what you think looks good, you know? And bright colors do give you energy. We come over here to this Monochro. Mono world and everything has to

match and everything has to be subdued. No, and if you're Black, you know you ain't supposed to wear bright colors and if you big oh God. You ain't supposed to wear bright colors, so to bright. No, no, no, no. So bright colors. Made me feel so. I used my I used colors. I used music. I use aromatherapy because I would have candles in my room sometimes. Just having that classroom neat and clean. That if if your environment is neat. That helps. This up here to stay neat. That's what I thought. Think. And so those are the things I did. For my Wellness. Being to being to class on time helped. Maybe not rushing. I used to get to work like 40 minutes before I was due. I did that in the beginning or an hour before. When I got near the end the last five years. I was and it wasn't that I wasn't awake, I was swinging in at the very last minute.

01:07:12

DM

So why do you think you were swinging in at the last minute?

01:07:14

D. Davis

Because I was just. I was. I was in despair. I didn't like it. I didn't want to be there.

01:07:19

DM

Why didn't you want? To be there.

01:07:21

D. Davis

Oh my gosh. You know, it wasnt about education? They telling me if a student gets a 34, give him a 60, its still failing. You know, I'm like, it's the difference. Well, it's failing. It's failing. No, it's not. This means, you know, 35% of the work. This means, you know, 60, there's a difference. You know, the kids leave paper on the floor and and pencils want you to go ahead and pick it up, pick it up. I aint picking up nothing. Buy them paper and pencil. I'm not buying them nothing because they have hats and T-shirts that got the tag on it, where they spent \$60.00 and I went to talk to the principal. Why are you enabling these? I said this is like welfare. And he said, well, Ms Davis, everybody else is doing it. I said that don't make it right. So I was constantly in activism mode. Pushing against this, pushing against that, you know, so.

01:08:13

DM

So that that experience, was that like blocking your Wellness, you think those last five years? Where things going on that kind of blocked you from.

01:08:21

D. Davis

The main thing that blocked my Wellness was that when I first went to Lakeside, there were two or three classes that I taught on my own. Self study skills, and some history. OK, I had my own classroom. I could run it in my way within the confines what Dekalb county wanted. I can go overboard and do more than what they asked for. I can make sure my students got something. Then they stopped allowing special Ed teachers to do that. So we were always a Co teacher. And sometimes you were a co-teacher with an idiot. Everybody that's smart can't teach. Teaching and preaching and two professional professionals is very easy to hide. You can make a wonderful grade on that test, and when they they tell you when they coming to observe you. So when when they do, fine. But on a daily basis, what are you doing? So very easy to hide. So now I'm with some idiots. No brag, just fact. Some idiots and I'm having to sit there to try to figure out how to work with them. Will they accept you being able to share work with them? That's one thing. But when they fight you.

01:09:46

DM

And it's hard going to school every day and knowing I'm gonna have to work with this person and be in this.

01:09:53

D. Davis

There were some moments and classes. G Sand, Dr. O, Dr. P. There were some instances where I worked with it. Oh, yeah.

01:10:03

DM

It was good? Y'all was bopping y'all was doing the thing.

01:10:04

D. Davis

Oh yes. You know, they they took what I knew. You know,

01:10:11

DM

They valued.

01:10:13

D. Davis

They valued what I knew and they allowed me to use it, and they even used some of it.

But I'm put in here with some of these white men on a lot of the men. They're not budging.

01:10:25

DM

The men weren't budging and giving you space to do you and or didn't support you you feel like? Or valued you?

01:10:33

D. Davis

Didn't support, didn't value, wasn't moving over at all. I had one his he was civil. Civics, whatever and, he was also a basketball coach. And he. I asked him if I could, you know, could teach some of the classes and teacher so. He said sure. See, he had his lesson plans with the whole semester laid out. He had the worksheets. He was going to use. He used the same one every year. So he had this big book with everything and then I said OK, well in teaching this I might want to use a different worksheet. I'll come from a different angle. Wouldn't let me do it.

01:11:14

DM

Do you think it's because you're a woman or cause you're black? Because you was anything?

01:11:18

D. Davis

All of the above, and maybe they would like my lesson better than his. Maybe all of the above, and he had this big notebook and the last year that I worked with him, somebody stole the notebook. One of them doggone kids.

01:11:36

DM

Said I'm tired of this.

01:11:38

D. Davis

And he had to come up with some new stuff.

01:11:43

DM

But probably been doing them same sheets for years. 5-10 years, yes, 15.

01:11:50

D. Davis

Yes, and that's what happened with the math when they came in with the new way of, it wasn't a new math, it's just a new approach to math. The math teachers, they they didn't send them all to be trained. They sent some to be trained. They sent me because I was a special ed teacher and led several math classes and I wanted to go so we would go and they were supposed to come back and share with the other math teachers. While they teaching and they say Ok. And they close that door and go right back on doing things the way they always did because they're thinking was Dekalb County always got something new. And then two years later, we're going to be right back to the old things and also Ms Baba Danato, a good math teacher. She was the one that pointed out to me. She said, Ms. Davis, she said. We learned math, kill and drill. We'll drill and kill. And we did well in it. That's why we became math teachers, this is different. This wants you to be a creative thinker this wants you to be a critical thinker, she said. And all the math teaches, that's not what they excel in. So to do this, you got to make a shift, so she spent one when they had those. When that turn came that summer, she was redoing her lesson plans and and everybody wouldn't do that.

01:13:10

DM

That take work.

01:13:12

D. Davis

It doesn't. That's too much like work, right? You know, forget that you know this is, you know, we all we avoided word problems, goodness gracious, avoided it like the plague. The teachers avoided it. The students, the students avoided it, you know. So no, it wasn't. The last five years, it was hard. The only thing that kept me going was my dance group

01:13:38

D. Davis

The dance that you had there at Lakeside.

01:13:40

D. Davis

At Lakeside. That I had cause my dance crew pushed me. Mis Davis, we want to practice more than once a week. We want to practice two or three days a week and Miss Davis, we want to start in August when school start. OK. And we want to do more than the Black history program, we want to do other things. OK. And we don't want to stop in February or March, we want to stop in May.

01:14:03

DM

You want to meet the students.

01:14:04

D. Davis

OK. And Mis Davis, you're not charging enough to be a part of this club, you. Need to charge more. You know, I had some leaders, and once I knew that they were willing to to work. And they want to be leaders. And I groomed. And move them.

01:14:21

D. Davis

And you gave them the space to find their own voice and feel safe.

01:14:25

D. Davis

We did competitions went to Valdosta, did competitions, dance competitions. We came in second, but we won 4-5 hundred dollars. And we were up against the category we were in included adults we didn't know that. So adults, they got money to go buy all these bling, bling costumes. We didn't have them. I made their costumes. I made that, and I told them. I said look, there's only so much I can do with this because we don't have money, I said. So you're going to have to really work because you will have to dance with your whole body. Which is what you supposed to be doing anyway. Dance with your face. Dance with your hands, you know, and the dance we were doing was called Sonu. And it's a very sensual dance. I tell them, not sexual, sensual, I said so. You know, if you got a smile and you got, you know, whatever you know, and they did. And they came in second place. They did well. They did so well they looked good a chance to go somewhere, take a bus ride, go somewhere. I was always taking them to a dance conference in July in Tallahassee. Took them every year just about every year. And that kind of cohesiveness we were the only group, Danie, in Lakeside, that took a trip and didn't have problems with sex, drugs, smoking, alcohol.

01:15:53

DM

None of that. You'll be off. They didn't even try.

01:15:59

D. Davis

Because they stayed with me.

01:16:01

DM

Yeah, they already knew.

01:16:02

D. Davis

Time to eat. OK, we going here to the shopping center. You go to the stores, you gotta go to any restaurant in here you want. Well, I want something else. Then you gonna fast today, because we're going to be here. You got a partner you couldn't go to the ice machine without a partner. You couldn't go down to the pool without a chaperone. And after the conference, they usually have a big party in the evening. Well, we going? No. I cant control y'all in that atmosphere. So but anyway so. That was the only thing. That group teaching that group and working with that group was what kept me. They even. Remember that movie Radio? They got to meet the extra guy. The got to meet the actual guy, took pictures with him we were dancing at it. It was some kind of thing to try to pull people who had left school to come back. You know program that would help them, the dropouts, and we were recommended and we danced. They had so many experiences with that group. But but but go sit in the classroom with a teacher who doesn't know what he's doing and the children, the inmates are in control of the facility. Hurt me to my heart.

01:17:22

DM

Well, we have about four minutes left, so we're going to go ahead and get to our last question. Which I think I'm just going to sum it up in saying, you know, you decided to participate in an oral history study on black women teacher activists. What do you want future Black women teachers to know?

01:17:47

D. Davis

To know. I dont know how you're going to write this in your report. (laughs)

01:17:58

DM

Oh, it's your words. I'm not writing. This is your words. Your legacy.

01:18:05

D. Davis

Toubob doesn't necessarily, love you or willing to make a space for you. You will have to make a space for yourself so where the word, the phrase Toubob? You ever heard? When roots came out. That's what we referred to white folks. Toubob don't necessarily love you and are not going

to necessarily make you welcome. Their not going to make a space for you necessarily. They will accept you up to a certain level once you exceed their expectations. Then something must be wrong. Because there's a possibility that you're actually brighter than them? I mean, my Mama taught me this when I was young and I've seen evidence of it everywhere that I've gone. Is it everybody? No. So, African American teachers band together and increase your strength. I could not have done that black history program and it was always a success, the years that I was there, without those other teachers helping, contributing. So, you know, not just women men too, but band together, women band together. Be able to support one another. One of the calls that I got was from Naola who taught Food and Consumer Science at Lakeside. When they they had to do a big project and so they had to have judges. So she asked me if I would. I would go. I judge judge some of the competitions. You know, go to Cordon Blue. You know, help with, you know, encourage the kids because, you know, they scared now they you know, so. We have to support one another. We have to support one another and work together where we can work together. Everybody can't work together. It is not necessary that everybody works together. But in order to strengthen. You know what it is you have and What did you want to do? You gotta find that support. You gotta find that support. And and even if you just find one. But recognize all the things you're fighting against. Racism. Sexism. You know, with me I'm a minority in many ways I'm Muslim. You know, so you have to yeah, you have to find ways to to do things. Bill Cosby spoke at one of the Spellman graduations. And he told the women. He said. Don't be sitting here and looking to a Fortune 500 company to give you some great CEO position. They ain't looking for you to infiltrate what they have? You will have to do your own. You have to start your own. He said and don't wait for the men. He's said of a lot of them in prison, braiding each other's hair. He said you can't wait for that. He said you have to and that's the courageous thing to do because, you know the the higher you get an educational position, the fewer your partner prospects are. So we tend to hold ourselves back because you know. But he was like. Forge ahead. Go ahead. And so that's what I'm saying. Find, you know. The bond where you can work together. I work with people at Avondale. I work with people at DSA. I work with people over at I can't remember. Maca something. McNair. Yeah, had a dance sister over there. So find that bond. You know and and also. Whats the school that supposed to be green up there by. That mall. Up I20. It's the latest mall that was built. Stonecrest. There's a school over there. The name escapes me, but it's supposed to be a. Green School, you know and it's traditionally black. It's got a lot of black, you know. And so if you don't do well there, you can say, you know, but the relationships you have with these different schools. Because the relationship doesn't have to be with somebody. In your school. It could be. With other schools. We can't. Make it on our own. Whether it's with a business. It's hard. So bond together.

01:23:07

DM

OK. Well, thank you so much for your time. I appreciate you talking with me. I appreciate all the gems, just so much wisdom, so much knowledge. I'll be in contact to share the transcripts from our conversation so you can overlook the transcripts, and you can say, oh, I like this. No, I don't

like this. Don't say that. X that out. All those different types of things. But I just really from the bottom of my heart, sincerely want to thank you for your time.

Tamara Ivy

Interview 1 and 2, 2/11/2023, at Tams' home

00:00:01

DM

This is just a recording that's all. And then I'm going to also record it on my phone because sometimes stuff just doesn't work.

00:00:20

Tam Ivy

It's know what you mean. Let me know if you get cold. I have hot flashes.

00:00:27

DM

I am very comfortable, no worries.

00:00:58

DM

Ok. So what? OK, So what I did is I just started me a WebEx like a Zoom room so I can record the conversation and it produces a transcript, but it's only just, no one else is in the room.

00:01:09

Tam Ivy

Oh, that's cool.

00:01:10

DM

It's just me as. You can see. But just so it can produce the transcript while we're talking. So yes, all right, let's get this thing started. Today is 2/11. 2/11/23 It is currently 11:27 AM. And can you say your name for me?

00:01:43

Tam Ivy

Your name for me? Tamara Ivy.

00:01:50

DM

Now, do you want me to call you Tamara, or do you want to? Call you Ms. Ivy. What makes you feel?

00:01:53

Tam Ivy

Whatever. It's Tamara. Or Tam. It doesn't matter.

00:01:58

DM

Ok. Ok. Alright. Well, and I'm at. I'm. At your home. Right. Home in Conyers. Alright. Ms. Ivy. So this interview has been conducted during the Black Woman teacher activist Wellness Research period. I hope this will better help me understand your experiences with Wellness and how your Wellness practices have assisted you in navigating the education system and staying whole during life pandemics. You have received the consent form to sign which indicates your consent to the interview. This interview is being audio recorded. All right. So thank you for joining me today. Thank you for joining me today is February 11th, 2023 and my name is Danie Marshall. And this is my first interview with Miss Ivy. During this during the Black Woman Teacher Code Research project. How are you doing?

00:02:55

Tam Ivy

Today I'm good. How are you?

00:02:57

DM

I am doing well, I am just, you know, one foot in front of the other. So let's just start off with some background questions about you. So what is your name? Where were you born? Tell me about your family origins.

00:03:14

Tam Ivy

My name is Tamera Lashana Ivy. Whoop whoop. I was born in Detroit, MI from P Ivy and R Ivy, my family origins roots in Detroit. But from my parents perspective is from Alabama and Mississippi, so I have some southern roots. And a little Southern drawl that comes out every time I try to say some things, but I get to drawl because when I was little, I used to make fun of my cousins every year coming down South. And so it just rubbed off on me. So they say, never say never and don't make fun of people. And that's what happened. Right, my caregivers basically where my of course, my mom. They divorced when I was seven years old. They were high school sweethearts. So she took care of me, and especially my grandparents, my grandma and grandfather, which are her parents. And we live right next door to my grandparents after the divorce. So my grandparents played an influential, you know, aspect in my life due to my mom always working, you know, trying to make ends meet for my brother and I. So I have a brother and he's two years younger than me. When they say sibling rivalry, it is right there because I always tell my mom you raised me but you pacify your son. So yes, that's kind of like a place. My traditional name. I have a nickname. My nickname is Woo Baby.

Yes, I got it from my uncle. He doesn't have any children. He passed away years ago, but. His name was J, JM, and I got the nickname because he used the babysitting. And I would always be over there, he would always have this look like kool-aid. But it wasn't kool-aid. So come to find out, it was Tom Collins. And when I was two years old, I would always ask for it. And he was spoiled because I was only granddaughter niece or whatever. And I would go around saying whoo. Woo! So he started calling me Woo Baby. So my mom found out she cussed him out. She got into him. So she's like, you getting my baby drunk at two years old. So that's a little funny story I wanted to share, but. My mom, she was a clerk at the Detroit Public Library. She went to school for business education to be a teacher. She went to Eastern Michigan, but she dropped out

because she partied too much. OK. So that's one thing and she always wanted me to go go to college, finish college because she didn't do it. And you know how some of our parents live their dreams through us. So that was one of the things that I accomplished for her graduating from college. I like college so much I graduated from it 3 times. My family members I am proud of...

00:06:28

DM

Hold up Hold up. So tell me what? What what? What colleges did you? Go to 0.

00:06:35

Tam Ivy

Oh Yeah I couldn't leave that out. I went to Central Michigan for my bachelors. I received a Bachelors of Science and Secondary Ed. I was a double major double minor.

00:06:42

DM

What year was this?

00:06:43

Tam Ivy

This was 97 graduated in 97. And I majored in it was like history social studies because it was like two different versions of it, not really versions. But in that school system, either you're going to be a history major for the college side to be a professor, or social studies for the public school, and my minor was business. Information systems and English for to teach in the school. So really I didn't know what I wanted to be when I grew up. So I left there and then I started teaching it at Detroit Public Schools for a total of 6 years. And within it was.

00:07:24

DM

Well grades?

00:07:25

Tam Ivy

8th grade for 7th and 8th grade for a little time and then high school and that was 11th and 12th. And while I was in, I think three years later, I went back and got a master's at Central Michigan again and I got it in human resource. After that, when I left Detroit in 2006, I lived in Baltimore for 11 years, and then I entered Towson University and got a second masters as a reading specialist. So they're proud of me for going, you know, making all those different transitions because like I said, my grandfather had to quit school and, well, in 12th grade 11th no 12th grade. Yeah, and help take care of the family because they live in Sparta, Alabama. And my grandmother, she never went to college as well. So they're all proud of me. Like I told you, my mother had dropped out of college because she was fast, you know, partying. So they're most likely proud of me for that. And then I don't have any children. So me from moving state to state and then finally coming to Georgia. They're like you don't let any grass grow under your feet. You know, you're just still doing. I'm still in the education system, educating your children to the best of my ability. Even though times are changing, but they're most proud of me for doing that

and another thing they're proud. I always did mentoring, mentoring young girls because when I was coming up I had all types of mentors and when one mentor that really stands out to me, Miss Hoban, she was my English class slash forensic speech teacher at King High School, where I went to school in Detroit. And she was just phenomenal. She's just different. She was a little short, 411 real high yellow Creole woman, but she had a fine son. Anyway, I digress and she taught me. She you know, I had a hang up on myself because I have a big forehead. Always had when I was younger and would get teased about it and she was like Tamara, I know your mother have told you, you know, you're beautiful, you can do anything you want to do, she said. But you have a calling and she's the one that really sparked my interest to go into teaching even though I come from a line of teachers in the family, I didn't want to do that. I wanted to do business, but after speaking with Ms. Hoban it just brought a whole new life because she really installed positive thinking, she said. Hey, you got a big forehead, but you're smart. You on the Honor Roll. You haven't missed a spot. You've never been off the Honor Roll. You're doing things. You're known around the school for helping out, you know, and then you know you're a little fast, but you all right, you know. And she was just being real with me and that would help me get to where I want to be.

00:10:26

DM

So what's your birthday?

00:10:30

Tam Ivy

Oh, June 30th June.

00:10:31

DM

June 30th. OK, OK. OK. And so you said you grew up in Detroit? And then. You live in Boston, Baltimore, Baltimore. Baltimore, MD. For 11 years. What did you teach while you in Baltimore?

00:10:50

Tam Ivy

Yes, I taught. Don't ask me how many years I taught in the middle school there. OK, but. I thought I started middle school there, which was eighth grade. And then that middle school turned into a high school. That's what happened. It turned into a high school. And then I started teaching 11th or 12th grade there as well.

00:11:06

DM

And that was about 0? In 07/ 08 you moved to Baltimore

00:11:11

Tam Ivy

06

00:11:12

DM

06 you moved to Baltimore. And you were there for 11 years. OK. And then you after you left Baltimore, you moved to Georgia.

00:11:22

Tam Ivy

I moved to Georgia in 2017.

00:11:24

DM

OK, just putting together a timeline. Yeah, OK. I like it. I like. Are there like any traditional family names in your family. Any names?

00:11:37

Tam Ivy

Besides the regular juniors funds from fathers to sons, we have a lot of biblical names in our family. David, Isaiah. Joseph. James, it's a lot of James in the family. And one we I wouldn't say it's odd, but it wasn't really a name. They really didn't pass it down but we had Aunt Ruth. And Aunt Ruth didn't have any children either.

00:12:15

DM

But do you have more than one Ruth in your family?

00:12:17

Tam Ivy

No. That's the only Ruth we had in the family.

00:12:24

DM

Ok. And so I think you mentioned a little bit about your caregivers or your mom? You said that, you know, she worked for a living. She was really busy. And so your grandparents helped take care of you. But you did mention you have you come from like a family of educators. Were there other people? In your family, who were teachers?

00:12:44

Tam Ivy

Yeah, my favorite aunt. Aunt Christine. Bless her soul. She lived in Sprat, well, Marion, Alabama. Because my grandfather is from Sprat. My grandmother's from Marion and they were High school sweethearts too. So one of my finest memories, Aunt Chris. She was she started off as a teacher and then she was a principal. And every summer she would do summer school. So she would have me in the classes with her. I would be like her teacher aides. So, you know, I felt special. And then just being around her, she was one of the ones that taught me how to cook, even though I hate cooking. But you know down South, well they really cook so? And she was trying to teach me how to cook chitlins. No, I'm good. She would always make fun. She's like you're such a city girl. I'm like, yeah. And they would have these big picnics and being that they

were on a farm too. Girl, one year I don't forget they put a pig hung them on a clothesline. And they were showing the kids, especially the ones that's from Michigan. We were from the city. We would come down. They sliced the pig in the middle and they would show us all. The parts that we would eat right. So then it was time to eat. I said I'm not eating it. And they was like why? I said it didn't come from a grocery store. Now I'm nine years old telling them what I'm not gonna do, and they were like, Tamara. You're so city. It's the same food, but it's fresh. So me, I ate it anyway, because you know, they were gonna beat my butt if I aint eat it. But it was just funny how, you know, being from the city you're like, oh, you don't really pay attention where it's coming from. And then me getting to experience my family owning a farm. You know, I was able to tell the students, I teach, you know, hey the food is fresher when you're on farm all our stuff is, you know, produced. You know, that's how we get those. Uh, what? They call those things? When the chicken, the hormones we're eating, some of the hormones, some of the yes, yes, some of the preservatives, they're putting into our food. So that was kind of interesting. One of my finest moments. But my grandparents, they traveled a lot. So during the summer times, we would always go down South, visit the family so. Those one of the things they taught me how to be very family oriented, keeping in touch with everybody. So that's one of my downfalls to keep. I wouldn't call it a downfall, but you know, when other family members don't reciprocate, you trying to keep in touch with them and then they're always saying, well, you know, don't let it be a funeral. You know, when we all get together, but when you're trying to do a family reunion, you don't come through, then what you expect? So that's our summer. The fondest ups and down memories I have.

00:15:44

DM

How many children did your grandparents have.

00:015:45

Tam Ivy

My grandparents had four. My uncle J, he was the oldest. I never met him because he died before I was born. He had a caught a charlie horse in the pool and my uncle, his younger brother, thought he was, you know, playing cause they were always playing a pool, whatever and they didn't get in there to save him enough intime. So I never met my uncle, but I heard such great things about him. And he was a junior, so then I had my other uncle, J, the one that was giving me drinks. But let me go back. So my Uncle J was married. He didn't have any children. And my uncle J, he never had any, any children, but he had girlfriends. But he was my favorite. And then I have I had an aunt, but she was still born, her name was Y. And then my uncle. That's the only uncle that's in that family part right there. That's immediate family is my uncle, A that's still living. And he's back home. He used to live in Chicago for a while, but he's back home in Detroit. He has. A son. And that's it. My mom basically was the only girl because you know her sister was still born.

00:17:10

DM

Tell me about some of your family. Members that you're proud of.

00:17:17

Tam Ivy

My Aunt B. Who my grandfathers. One of his sisters, that's twin because there were twins. Twins run on his side of the family because his one of his uncles had nineteen children. Yes, girl and out of the 19 children, there were four sets of twins. So yes, Aunt B. Who lives in Kentucky? Her husband is military, so she was going around. She has three sons. She never had a daughter. And she worked as a nurse an RN,, and she was a psychiatric nurse. I didn't know until a couple of years ago that she was a psychiatric nurse. I just thought she was an RN, but she was an RN at one time, but I'm proud of her because she her oldest son, Bill. He was special needs. And he was the oldest. The other two sons. They're, you know, they're not special needs, but everybody catered to Bill and Bill has such a loving soul. He passed away just a year ago as 65 or 66. But through all, she persevered. You know, she was. She's the type of person nobody can take care of him better than I could, so she wouldn't ask for help for anybody because she did everything and I just admire her for that because it takes a strong woman and somebody who's real loving, caring to take care of someone with special needs. For me, being in the education system, I see how some of the kids are treated and just seeing how she does it compared to some of the families that I have seen with special needs kids is like, Oh yeah, but they probably don't have that. You can't blame it all on them because they probably don't have that help, that family helping system. But I just was like, wow, I'm really she just took him everywhere. She didn't care.

00:19:16

DM

Amazing. So, describe your childhood. Tell me what were you like as a child.

00:19:20

Tam Ivy

Oh Girl. Let's see. Oh, kind of like some of. Our students, smart mouth, but like I said before, I was on the honor roll. Very flirty ish, flirtatious fast, you know. I like to travel because I had a family that traveled all the time. I was on the cheer team in high school for a year. Because I was the type person I had to work on to make some money because I'm a shopaholic, I love clothes. If I knew then what I know now. I would have saved that money. Instead of buying clothes all the time. But yeah. Was on the cheer team. Worked. I went to every party just like I did in college, went to every party and stayed on the Deans list. My mother always said I don't know how you do it because she was the one that partied and didn't stay on all the Deans List, but that's the type of person I am.

0020:26

DM

OK. So you grew up in Detroit, would you call it like a historic part of Detroit or is it like?

00:20:31

Tam Ivy

Now the school I went to was in a historic part called the Black Bottom where they had when they had the 60s riots. I think it was the 60s riots. That whole part of Detroit had burned up, and after the riots, I want to say in the late 70s they built it back up. So I was like. 5 minutes from there, if you ever heard of Belle Isle. That's a historic area I could actually walk to Belle Isle. So

that's the area. And then behind us, 2 minutes behind us is Indian Village where a lot of your prominent black people in Detroit lived as well.

00:21:10

DM

What was it like? I've never been to Detroit, so I'm just curious, what was it like? I know it's a city steeped in history and black history. What was it like growing up there? I hear a lot about like the Ford plants and things and then the taking away the jobs. Did you experience any of those?

00:21:30

Tam Ivy

My father worked for Chrysler. My grandfather had worked for Chrysler. So yeah, everybody you talked to worked in one of the big three Ford, GM and Chrysler and they worked overtime, you know to to make more money than what they were getting paid. They would have a lot of layoffs. My dad experienced the layoff so he and then that caused him to go work for the city of Detroit as a bus driver and that's where he retired from so. Some basically, my experiences in Detroit was fine. You know, I was in the neighborhood. It was. It didn't really get drug, drug infested. Until after I graduated from high school. But during high school, yes, there were. Yeah, it was. Drugs in the community and but our block club was real strong. You know, we had the neighborhood watch where people looked out for each other during that time.

00:22:43

DM

Did you live on the same street your whole time while you grew up? What you reppin? Rep your block.

00:22:51

Tam Ivy

Yeah Girl. Seabird Mack and Dorsey area. I mean it's cool. It's really it was family oriented. Everybody lived like either next door to their grandparent. Or aunt and. So yeah. So my grandparents were in the middle. We were on the left side. My one of my uncles was on the right side, which was my grandfather's brother, then my grandfather's brothers son lived on the other side. Then you know how we have play aunts and uncles. I had a play aunt and uncle down the street. That's because my mother 's best friend. People down there. Right. So we were all family. My Aunt Ruth lived like 8 blocks away, so it was all family oriented during that time. A lot of family.

00:23:43

DM

Ok. Tell me about your most memorable vacation as a child, though, you might have told me about it when you mentioned the pig on the farm, that was the most memorable.

00:23:56

Tam Ivy

That wasn't the most. My most memorable vacation when we when I was nine or ten, my mom, my grandfather, and my grandma, my brother, we all went to California. We went to Los Angeles, CA and we went to Disneyland and my grandfather. I want to say Granddad was like, what's he 60? And my granddad had to be probably in his 50s and we made him get on a roller coaster girl that now that was fun because he was like, he was screaming all the way through. That was fun.

00:00:01

DM

Oh, it's just telling me that I'm supposed to be meeting with you. We already meeting, OK.

00:24:51

Tam Ivy

So getting my grandfather on the roller coaster was hilarious.

00:24:55

DM

I bet. Was that his first time on the roller coaster?

00:24:57

Tam Ivy

Yes, it's very first time in his last.

00:24:59

DM

Did he yell?

00:25:00

Tam Ivy

He screamed all through it, especially, you know, growing up he was like. OK, we're good. And it was, I think it was called the Matterhorn, and it was one of the tallest ones at Disneyland. So it went up, and then as soon as it went down, he screamed all the way till we got off. It was hilarious, so that was, remember. And then the walk on the star hallway, Hollywood of Fame, seeing all the different stars. So that was memorable. What else did we? Do in LA. We had a cousin that lived in San Pedro and she came down and took us around. So that was cool.

00:25:38

DM

I like it that sounds like. A fun trip I haven't. Been to LA yet? That sounds like fun though. So how did you get around as a child?

00:25:47

Tam Ivy

We, since Detroit is known as the Big Three, we always had cars. We always had two or three cars at a time, so I got around basically on went through my parents for my grandparents and

then a couple of times, you know, when I didn't want to be bothered with them, I would get on the bus and go to school. But it was basically cars.

00:26:10

DM

OK. And again, we talked a little bit about your block in your community. How often did you see people from the community get together? Like, did you all have like events and things and?

00:26:21

Tam Ivy

Yes. Once a month they would have a not, yeah. A Neighborhood watch Community block party. So in the summertime because, you know, it gets cold in Detroit in the summer time. They would bring this big old mobile pool and put it in the middle of the street and block it off and kids would get in the pool. So yeah, and we had vaguely I remember I was probably five or six. My uncle, he was involved in the Black Panther movement too, so when it was kind of dying out or whatever, most of them would get together and still provide. Like the food pantry stuff to the neighborhood. So yeah, my uncle was involved in that even though he was a thug still, but he was involved in community.

00:27:17

DM

He was aware. He was giving back. Is there anything else you think I should know about your childhood?

00:27:28

Tam Ivy

The I would really say the scarring of my parents divorce, that really took a toll on me and I never really got the. I never got over it put it like that and I never went to see anybody for it. My mother tried to get us to go see anybody for it, but you know, it's always the black headspace of naw we can work it out. And I really wish I would had went through it instead of being so boisterous about it because it did affect me. A lot. Even though my mom never ever talked bad about my father. But my father didn't do things that he was supposed to do so. As growing up I Always had an issue with guys you know. I never had a guy treat me bad or anything like that, but I wouldn't stay in a relationship long because I always would. Yeah, you're just going to do, you know, because, you know, they say how girls try to find someone like their father well not trying to find somebody, but they do find somebody like their father. Either good or bad. So that is one of the things I would highly recommend when children are going through divorces or separations or even their parents not married. Using that two different families, you're going through to get seek some help and it doesn't mean that you're crazy or, you just you just need the help. You just need somebody that's nonjudgmental, that doesn't know you to just help you with what you're going through. Instead of seeking it when you get to. Be 49 48 years old. And finding out. Hey, you know, that's the stem you had. You had this stigma. So I think it would help a whole lot.

00:29:18

DM

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Switching gears a little bit, tell me about some of the stories you've heard. About your ancestors.

00:29:27

Tam Ivy

That they will persevere through anything. They would not go to school in order to help the family. I learned that from being a history major, I had did the research on my grandma's side. My grandmother's side is mixed. There's a lot of white on that side and I found out that we're descendants of Mary Todd, who was husband, I mean wife Lord have mercy, the wife of Abraham Lincoln. Yes, schizophrenia does run. In the family on that side. So that was very interesting. And anytime I talk about the Civil War, where my students and we're talking about Abraham Lincoln and I said, yeah, I am a descendant of that. They were like, but Ms. Ivy, you're black. I'm like, I know, but I have taught you about history and the races mix. And I said little do you know Abraham Lincoln was half black as well. So I said, you know, and I give them history about them, and then they sit back and be like. OK, you know, and I think that made them a little more interested in their culture and about history because I have a lot of students like I don't need history. Why should I learn? It, and I'm like history, repeats itself. It does. And if you don't know who you are, you don't know where you're going to go. So that's a little tidbit where my ancestors found out that about that, and then a lot of my family members were preachers and teachers. Preachers and teachers, yes.

00:31:05

DM

UM. Have you? Heard anything about ancestry going back to Africa?

00:31:13

Tam Ivy

No, and that's what I want to do one day? Find out. I don't know what tribe we're from. But as far as the Native Americans I know we're Cherokee. And Iroquois. Yeah. Cherokee don't know about the African tribe yet. One of my cousins is doing the ancestry.com to find out. So that would be interesting.

00:31:43

DM

There's a lot of mixing. There's a lot of mixing. We know that you know that. OK. Well, what impact has these stories had on your life? Right. Thinking about the stories you've heard about your answers, the story thinking about them sometimes not going to school to help out or even thinking about all the way back to Mary Todd, like, what impact has that had on your life knowing these stories.

00:31:04

Tam Ivy

That this education is the key that I come from a line of strong men, strong black men and women who just persevere. And it helps me to craft my career of teaching better and then now I kind of understand why, you know now. Some way history is repeating itself. It is repeating

itself, but as far as the kids that I teach now, half of them are leaving school to go help out because, you know, we had the pandemic and all that and they just want to help their parents make ends meet, you know, and then it's kind of. It's kind of sad too, because you want those kids to get that education, at least the basics. To help themselves, because it's just like I told them the other day, I went to McDonald's and gave the girl. My bill came to \$10, gave her 20 and she gave me \$10 back. You know the \$20. 20.00 back. She didn't give me the \$10.00, but she gave me \$20 back. Yes, and that happened twice. Three times with three, you know, three different children at three different McDonald's. So you know, I mean, I understand you want to go help your parents or whatever. But you have to get the basics. We got to find some way to like balance it because I know during the pandemic when it was fresh. And they were coming back to school for the first time. A lot of them was leaving at 11:00, o'clock to go to McDonald's to work you know. And I'm like, ooh, you still have class. So just learning from where I came from, from my, my ancestors, you know, I can understand why that why? But somehow. Have the balance you know.

00:33:50

DM

Yes. Yeah. Are there any traditions from your grandparents or ancestors great Grandpa or whatever that you still practice like holidays, foods, heirlooms, anything like that, that you steal holidays every year? No, every two years.

00:34:05

Tam Ivy

Holidays. All that. Every year, no every two years. The immediate family my grandfather's people because it was ten of them. We would get together in different because everybody's living in different states, so every family would take. For Labor Day and we just have a cookout. Where the immediate families get together so that has dwindled a lot since the elders have passed. And my aunt Burley is the last one of the immediate family. Next year, my cousins it's the white family, my cousin Brenda. They'll be taking over, but it's like each year. So one year we did it. Couple of years. But we did it in Detroit one year and we did the thing. In Luau and everybody had to come in Luau attire, and we just, you know, fellowship with each other. But everybody tries to compete against each other, but they can't beat the Ivy- Melton side because we always have a theme. So that's the tradition.

00:35:10

DM

OK. Oh, yes. And everybody else don't have a theme?

00:35:11

Tam Ivy

No, they don't have a theme and when they try to have a theme they don't work out. And then and then. So when we when the like the Ivy-Melton side does it, we also incorporate family friends. You know, they can bring their friends or whatever, you know, just making a big community thing because we all related, believe it or not, some type of ways. So that's one of the things we do. Another tradition. We do. We try to do a family reunion every two years, whatever year the brothers and sisters, they call it the brother, sister, dinner, whatever year.

[Speaker

This meeting is being recorded.]

00:35:51

DM

Yes, it's OK. It's recording on my computer too.

00:35:56

Tam Ivy

The brother. So when so say, like this year was last year, was supposed to be the family reunion. And this year is the brothers and sisters. So for the family reunions, it would be every two years. I did it because the elders was tired and they said they knew the younger generation should. So I did one in Baltimore, when I lived in Baltimore and then when I moved to Atlanta. That was 2017. So that reunion was 2018. I did it here, and I had a theme, of course, of colors and whatever. But the reunions that that's a big thing we have, it's been dwindling. You know, some of the people are not coming now, but we plan to get it back. So that's the tradition as well. And with the reunions. We have that Thursday will be meeting greet. And you just have game night. Friday, no, meet and greet Friday would be shopping. Whatever you want to do and then Friday night would be game night, so I had set it up like Las Vegas. Sounds cool, and then that Sunday, Saturday, that Saturday would be the banquet earlier during the day. Everybody do what they want to do and then we have the family banquet, which we put on the little program. It could be fashion show or whatever and that will happen. And then Sunday we will have church and brunch and everybody go back home. So that's one of our, two of our traditions that we do.

00:37:27

DM

Ok. So thinking about, you know, doing a family reunion, you all spending that time every two years, and you also do Labor Day. Are there any when you hear the word religion and spirituality, what comes to mind? Let's start with that. When you hear the word religion or spirituality. What comes to mind?

00:37:51

Tam Ivy

What comes to mind is all of us being Baptist at one time, going to the same church. Communion went together and then eventually we branched off, but we still we're a praying family, so whatever we do, we pray for one another, even if we call each other. We're having a prayer. We're saying a prayer or we're always saying love you. We were instilled as young to put God first in anything we do. Good or bad? First, that was our thing. So yeah, our people, our family went to church a lot.

00:38:301

DM

Think about praying you think about. About church, about being a Baptist. What do you think about being a Baptist? When you hear Baptists? What words come to mind? And what feelings or thoughts? Come to mind.

00:38:45

Tam Ivy

They always singing for hours.

00:38:47

DM

OK. Singing. Yeah, the choir.

00:38:50

Tam Ivy

And the Baptist Church, but since. Then I mean, you know, I got older, I realized. That's just a name of a religion. You know you can worship God anywhere long as you have God in your heart. Doesn't Matter

00:39:07

DM

So tell me about your religious or spiritual practices.

00:39:12

Tam Ivy

Really, it's just. I say my devotions in the morning because I need to be prayed up before I can. Win the building, OK? And I pray you know, and I go to church, I try to go to church every Sunday, cause if I missed like, last Sunday before last, I missed. I felt bad. You. Know, but I like to be around other people. That's like mine. And that's just fellow fellowship with other people. My religion, I mean just basic. I like to go to Bible study. I go to the women's prayers called wow. Women of the word. That's the second Saturday each month and go there and just think about things you know and talk to the women about what's going on. It's a way to relieve stress and we always have a word behind it. So and that feels good.

00:40:09

DM

Is your church virtual or in person?

00:40:11

Tam Ivy

Its in person.

00:40:12

DM

What, do you mind me asking, what church?

00:40:14

Tam Ivy

Its Word of Faith. But I'm not a member there, but I go there. I haven't joined actually joined a church since I moved here because I knew I was going to be moving again and the next place I'm moving to will be permanent so...

00:40:29

DM

How have your, religious or spiritual practices evolved from childhood to now.

00:40:37

Tam Ivy

I take it more seriously now. When I was a child, I just did it. I was doing it for my parents, you know, it was something that was instilled. You have to do that. You have to do that even though I got baptized at 7 or 8. I did it because I wanted to. I didn't do it because of them, but I think I did it more because I was scared God was going to strike me down. You know how they tell you the stories? But as I got older, I know I'm going to rededicate myself soon. I know that it should. Like I said, it has shaped me to take it more seriously. To be more outspoken in a good way, not a bad way to really say what I think instead of holding it in because I used to hold grudges like real bad, so it has helped me with that and. Be with like minded people and to find my prayer now, since I told you about the divorce of my parents and everything, is to find someone who's God fearing. Family oriented. And really have characteristics like my granddad did because he took care of the family, you know? And he loved his mother-in-law. When my mother, my great grandmother, got sick, he took care of her, even though it was my grandmother's mother, he still took care of, he said, we're a unit we're one. When other family members I knew had their issues, you know, he just showed me how a man should treat you. Cause one day we were downtown walking, I never forget, he said. Girl, get on, get on the left side of me, I said why grandad? He was like cause, if you're on the right side, that mean the man don't want you. He trying to sell you and he said you see them firefighters we walking past, they probably want you girl. So get over here so. So just you know, yeah, you know, and then just reading. It's funny. I had spoke about my Aunt Ruth and being that that was one of the only biblical female names we were just talking about. The book of Ruth the other day at church. You know how she was with her. Yeah, Ruth with her. With her mother-in-law, you know how they took care of each other. So yeah. So that has shaped me to just be a better person. Girl (laughs)

00:43:13

DM

Powerful. Shout out to granddaddy. Oh. Uh, so yeah. How do your practices? How do your religious practices influence other areas of your life. So thinking about teaching Wellness activism like motherly, how your mother, your students, how does your religion influence you? Or show up? Or does it? Might not?

00:43:45

Tam Ivy

Oh I never thought about that? I don't know. It shows up because I know sometimes in in the classroom I was like. How many y'all go to church? You know, I'm, like y'all need Jesus and they'll laugh, and they'll be like, no, seriously, they do it. And I, you know, and I. Ask the kids, I said well. How many of you believe in God? You know, and some of them will say yes, some of them and some of them be scared. And I say if you don't, you know. It's OK because eventually you'll find it one day. You know, you'll find Him one day, but just know that there is a higher power. If you believe in Buddha, whatever, that's your preference, but just know. Good deeds

come in handy, I said. You will be blessed and usually when the kids come out, I say hey beautiful. Hey handsome and me saying things like that lately. I'm glad you brought that up. Lately, the kids were saying Mis Ivy have a blessed weekend and it's just like, OK, even some of the kids that don't even go to church. Have been saying it lately. So I guess me just encouraging them on a daily basis, just speaking a word like, hey, how you doing or just uplifting them giving them a name because, some of the kids like, you didn't give me no nickname. You must don't like me. I'm like, I like you. I just haven't figured out a name for you, you know, especially the kids that got these African names I can't pronounce. Bonquisha names that I don't like. I give them a nickname and that just sits with them, you know, so I think. Because from reading some of the passages I've been reading lately, they just say encourage be encouraged. So I just try to encourage the kids. With the word. Even if they don't hear it, I know I did my part.

00:45:32

DM

I understand, I understand. So when you hear the word, Black. What comes to mind?

00:45:43

Tam Ivy

Power because we are powerful people. We were the first of everything and truth be told. But we're such a giving people and passionate people, we just get ran over sometime. You know what I mean? Like they take over. I try to tell the kids, as some history teacher, just bring it on. You know that we were the first. Don't be ashamed. Just because you're not good in math, Know, that black people were the ones that did the math. So I mean, some of you can't read, but we are the readers. We started with the Bible when we were taken over here, taken from our native land so. You know, don't ever doubt yourself, just if you're not good at something, just practice. I don't like math, but I practice. I said don't yall hear me asking y'all for some help sometime when we dealing with ECON and they're like. Yeah. So OK, so I need help too. Just because I'm grown, that doesn't mean I know everything, but I know some things that you all don't know. So yeah.

00:46:58

DM

How did you first become aware of your blackness?

00:47:04

Tam Ivy

For my mom. Because she told me, no matter where you go, you are beautiful. Regardless, don't let nobody talk about your skin. You have beautiful skin. You know your skin. I forgot the exact word she told me, but she was saying, you know how she was. She was afraid. You know how the white people have to sit out in the sun to get dark? They talk about us, but they want to be us. So don't never think you're less than what you are. So yeah, my mother taught me about my blackness.

00:47:41

DM

Ok. How do you feel being black? Has shaped your experience.

00:47:58

Tam Ivy

Say it one more time, think about.

00:47:59

DM

This how do you feel? How do you feel being? Black has shaped your experience. You feel the. Shape your experience your blackness.

00:43:13

Tam Ivy

It makes me be seen. It makes me seen. Because in the crowd of me going to a predominantly white college. It made my roommates, who were not black. Curious and wanted to know. So it's like, oh, I'm special. You know, I got some super powers being a freshman in college, but it helped them to be aware of, you know, not to be. Scared or judgmental of us because the roommate, the white roommate, the two suitemates I had that were white. They were from northern Michigan and way up there ain't nothing but white people and my roommate was real honest, she said. Tamara, I'm gonna be honest with you. Don't take it any type of way, she said. But only black people I seen was on the Cosby show. And she was, you know, we talked. And I asked her about why you always wash yall hair? You know, cause she because she asked. You'll don't have to wash your hair in the morning? I was like naw girl. You know, so it it made me be seen in and people want to be jealous, they envy us, they want to be us, even though the others might have more than what we have. But we got love.

00:49:30

DM

We got a lot of love. So you talked about like being college. What about in your teaching, like in schools? Have you taught at schools where maybe the majority of fact of faculty or teachers or teachers are black?

00:49:43

Tam Ivy

The majority pretty much have been black. I mean it's some white ones there, but they act like us, you know, even though we know they're they know they aren't, but still to be seen because you know, they just want to be with us, you know, find out what you know and I'll find out what you know? You know I can play that game too. Yeah. And I learned from them how to play the game, you know, so be seen especially being a woman.

00:50:17

DM

Well, thinking about being a woman, how does being a woman, impact your experiences in teaching or living or.

00:50:30

Tam Ivy

Just being a woman, knowing that we are the mothers of society and that the men you know. As women, we just have to I told the little girl. Get your respect demand your respect. Don't talk to the guys. I know. I'm going back to that, but don't talk to the guy. If you're talking to a guy that's sagging. You don't want that. They will pull their pants up if they really want to be with you, you know? It's all respect. You know? UM. Because we're the rulers. If story be told we are, you know, they said behind every black man there's a great woman and that is so true. Because the man is going to look for you for that help. You want to be a help mate. And not a knife.

00:51:27

DM

I hate to go back to childhood, but do you think that you being a girl during your childhood influenced the life that you had or how people treated you or?

00:51:36

Tam Ivy

Because I was, I was searching for that daddy figure. I had it from my father. Like I was telling you earlier. I had it from I had it from my grandpa. But I didn't have it for my father because my father. I don't know what was his issue. His father wasn't in his life like that too. I know that's just, you know, it transferred down, but he always would tell. I can hear conversation. Sometimes he would tell my mother, you know, I'm gonna be better than my father. I'm gonna be there for my children. But he wasn't you know so? I guess I had built a wall growing up. That ain't no man gonna take advantage of me, you know I'm gonna do. I can do. And like my boyfriend tells me now. He's like Tam. Quit grabbing that door. You know he's like, let me do it. And he's a gentleman. Don't get me wrong. I love him to death, but he's like Tam. You've been so independent since you was 12 years old. Cause we have known each other that long. We just united. (He was a....) Right. But that's a whole different story. But he changed his life. You know what I'm saying? And he was like, you know, let me be the man Tamara. He was like. Let me show you. What you want you need. It's like. He's like, don't give me that look. You know? And then I learned how to humble myself, going back to the Bible, reading, you know, the proverbs and everything, how men should treat a woman. And I've seen it from my grandfather. So, you know, let him let him be special. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I try not to be hard on them, you know, hard on me and that's. How I was, you know? Just like that I you aint got it I can do it you know, but I'm. Trying not to be that way. It's been working, it's been working, it's been working.

00:53:28

DM

Good. That's what we want.

00:53:31

Tam Ivy

And I've been trying to tell that to the girls because anything I learn, I want the girls to learn. I don't have any children, so I treat them like my like if. I had a child. I would treat them like that, you know, and I just want them to be aware because sometimes they're not getting it at home. And some of them come from abusive homes, you know, and I just want to be that light that shines to them say hey. I can do it because Ms. Ivy did it, you know, and I do share some of my background with them. Like I told some of the girls, hey. I had an abortion and they were like.

And this was in my mentor group. And I said, yeah, I was 23 full grown job and had an abortion. I said had abortion because the guy I was supposed to marry, we were engaged. He weren't reliable and I didn't want my child to go through that, and then it stems back from when I grew up just because you get married, you have children that don't mean a husband gonna be there. So that was my mentality. That was one of the main mentalities I got rid of the child for and they said do you regret it? I said at that time I did, I said. But no, it's a blessing because God blessed me in many other ways. I got 8 grand uh not 8 grand eight God children. You know, it's just that's just how it is. I have a niece and nephew. My niece is my mini me, you know, so.

00:54:51

DM

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So it sounds like you have a lot of good conversations, like a lot of real loving, honest conversations.

00:55:01

Tam Ivy

We get off topic a lot, but it helps. It helps. It helps though.

00:5:06

DM

Like parenting! Never a straight line. It's always. You know, just got to listening. Kind of see what's on their heart. And be open there.

00:55:20

Tam Ivy

That's my trick to get them to listen.

00:55:22

DM

What's the trick? What's the trick? Look, listening.

00:55:26

Tam Ivy

Yeah, listening. I just let them, you know. Let them know a little bit of my life, you know, and they get interested and then I'll be like. OK, now we gotta go back.

00:55:37

DM

Come back right? I like like.

00:55:38

Tam Ivy

I bargain with you, you know, or even when we get on certain topics. In ECON or history? And I said, oh, I remember the time. And then it was like what? What you thinking about? And it goes from there.

00:55:51

DM

Because they love people business. (Tam says: they nose). Like, don't let another teacher come in and they try. That's when the students listen. Listen, the most you can be up there teaching the whole time and they over there, drawing. But listen let somebody. Ms. Ivy you saw that... Bout to fall out the chair. Oh my goodness, I love it. I love it. I love it well. Let's see. What have been some of your best experiences? As a black woman teacher.

00:56:31

Tam Ivy

(Laughs) As a black woman teaching my best experience. It's just seeing the different dynamics of the kids, coming from. Middle school to high school. One of my students when I first started in 97 teaching, she's all grown up now, though she became a teacher and named her daughter after me. Her daughter name is Ivy, but she was pregnant with her in 8th grade. Yeah. So yeah.

00:57:03

DM

Oh wow. And that was your first year teaching.

00:57:04

Tam Ivy

So yeah. My first year of teaching and I was the cheerleader coach. And her parents were both preachers, and she asked me because I was taking her home that day and that same day, she said. Ms Ivy I have something to tell you and I would like you to help me with it and I'm like what? I'm pregnant, I said. I can't help you with that. I said, Are you sure? And she showed me the little test thing. This is the 8th grader girl. Show me the little test thing. And she said I want you to come in there and tell my parents, I said that's not my place boo, remember. First, year teacher. I'm like that's not my place and she was like, well, can you just at least stay in there while I talk to them, I said. OK. So when I went in there, I told. I can't remember their last name right now. I told Mr. and Mrs so and so your daughter has something she wants to tell you, and it's very serious. I think y'all should sit down for this. And they, you know, they respect me because I would come have dinner with them, you know, because I was the coach and she took an interest in me. So she was my little mentee and they listened. They and I said, OK, I'm going, I just wanted to be here while she told y'all and I'm out. So I left. So the next day, she came to school. She said, Miss Ivy. We talked about it, you know, they yelled and scream and everything cause she was a straight A student and the boy, in the same class as high straight A's too, Richard and she was like they were fine with it. But her finest being like, you know, they were talking to her and not yelling and screaming. But they did yell, she said, well, we're going to work it out. I said OK. OK. And to this day, little Ivy should be in college by now or something. I haven't heard from her in a couple of years, but that's the story that anytime I feel down at work and I feel like I'm not teaching or the kids not getting it, I just think back to that, you know, like, wow, she thought enough of me to go in there and sit with her, she thought enough of me. I was an influence on her. I told her don't go into education, but she did anyway. She majored in the same thing I did. History and English. She's teaching. I think she teaches in in high school.

00:59:39

DM

Why you told her don't go into education?

00:59:41

Tam Ivy

Girl! Because after all the experiences, we will keep in touch, you know. And when she got in college in her sophomore year, she said Ms. Ivy, alright, guess what? I'm gonna be a teacher. I said girl, don't do it. And she was like, why? And I would tell her, she said to me Ms. Ivy, but you still teaching. You still made an impact and she said I told you from day one when I saw you. I will always remember you. I said OK, gone head girl. Gone head. So yeah she's teaching.

01:00:11

DM

Uhm, what have been some of your worst experiences as a Black woman teacher?

01:00:21

Tam Ivy

Girl getting cussed out by the parents.

01:00:23

DM

Ok. Has that been your whole time or just in certain places?

01:00:25

Tam Ivy

Oh, just certain places. And then another worse experience is the admin just never listen. You know, we're the ones in the classroom. You want to come up with this idea. You should do this. You should do that. But you're not in the classroom. I believe every principal should at least teach one class. One class, while their principal every school year. To feel our pain and just how the system is just set up. You know, they're so based on their graduation rate that they don't care if the kids are have the basics or not. They just pass them through the system. And that really irritates me. Especially when they can't read. You're a 12th grader reading at a third grade level. So that's worse in my eyesight that I see as a black woman teacher.

01:01:23

DM

Thinking about some of those times, you had parents cuss you out. Why were they cussing you out?

01:01:30

Tam Ivy

Because they claimed that they didn't know their child was failing when they had access to infinite campus online. You have a calendar when parent teacher conferences are. I have called you. You haven't responded. There's not a right number in the system for me to get to you. I sent you a letter. Did you open it?

01:01:58

DM

And what about? Well, you mentioned a little bit about admin. Have you had a have could you would you say you always had a pretty good relationship with your admin or? Has there been?

01:02:11

Tam Ivy

I always had a pretty. Good relationship when it was a male admin. When it was a female admin, sometimes they feel like they're in competition with you because the kids would come to me, you know, come to me. Then they would go to them. So, I don't know.

01:02:27

DM

So what do you mean? Like they come to you for what?

01:02:30

Tam Ivy

Either advice or. Just advice on general or you know, well, I could have handled the issue with the parent. Or something like that.

01:02:40

DM

Oh. That's what the admin says. They wanna?

01:02:41

Tam Ivy

Yeah, yeah. yeah

01:02:44

DM

So you think like it's maybe like a power thing?

01:02:45

Tam Ivy

Yes, competition. Why are we in competition when we're in the in the game for the same thing I don't get. Or you know well, Ms. Ivy, you can't dress like this, I wear suits and heels all the time. You can't be coming up in here like that. You know, it's distracting. You know, we have male teachers. OK. Give them something to look forward to. I'm just saying.

01:03:09

DM

How you going to tell me I can't wear my suits and my heels?

01:03:11

Tam Ivy

And they would be in suits and heels too. That's what I'm saying.

01:03:14

DM

And they're wearing it, but you can't wear.

01:03:17

Tam Ivy

It's because they're not getting the attention.

01:03:20

DM

Because other male teachers in the building.

01:03:21

Tam Ivy

This is yes. Yeah, that's what I'm talking about. I mean, it's like it's like a reality show. It's just some school districts. I mean, some schools, I'm not going to say district, some schools. This is. And I ain't saying I'm the best but.

01:03:41

DM

Yeah, I understand. I mean, but you can't... There's male teachers in the building,

01:03:47

Tam Ivy

But that's just like I'm the teacher support coaching specialist at my at the school I'm at now, and one of the new teachers, she's been teaching, but she's new to the Dekalb and I think she's in her 3rd year of teaching. Yes, she's shapely. Yes, the outfits are going to be, you know, might look like they type, but they're not. But they don't take away from her teaching. She's doing what she supposed to do. The kids love her because she's a math teacher and she's teaching them. Actually, she's not sitting on her but like some other ones. Her, you know.

01:04:22

DM

Getting up and doing the job

01:04:24

Tam Ivy

And she recently she came to me about saying I told her. I said I had this same issue, you know, not with this administrator, but before in my other school in Baltimore. So, you know I said this how you deal with it. You know, just keep doing what you're doing. You know, wear a sweater outside because you got a big butt. Just put a sweater on when you coming out the room. You know it's ways to fix it, but you know you can still do what you.

01:04:55

DM

Uh, what about with community? What has been your relationships like with the school community?

01:05:01

Tam Ivy

To be honest, I'm not really into the community because I'm always gone. Because when I leave work, I'm gone. I'm either going to my second job or something like that, so I really don't have a relationship with the community, but I try to build a relationship with the parents of my students that I'm teaching. And that's usually good, because I'll call them and let them know, you know? Hey, they'll talk to them all nice and sweet like, hey, even though your child is acting up in my class, I know they have potential to do the best. Could you please get with them because I don't want this to hinder their grade, you know? So they they're pretty receptive to that.

01:05:41

DM

So reflecting on like these experiences that you had teaching or you know your experiences as a black woman teacher. How did they impact you when you first started teaching compared to now as a veteran teacher? So thinking about maybe, you know, you wearing your clothes and somebody saying to you that when you were at the beginning of teaching.

01:06:03

Tam Ivy

At the beginning of at the beginning of teaching, it was a high school. After I left the middle school. And I would always get carded in Detroit. We had. So the teachers had the students and teachers always had ID's and we would go through the metal detectors or whatever and I would always get pegged as a student. And the officers were like, where's your name? Where you going? You ain't supposed to be going that way. You're not. You're not part of the faculty, and I'll be like, and then they'll look. So that went on for like 3 weeks and then they caught on because I was fresh out too, you know, so after that, then you know the. I had seniors try to hit on you. I'm like, boy no, let's just get this done. You know, whatever. So. Just maturity, maturity. Now I know you know the ends and out of the education system and back then I was just trying to get through it, because I was young, looked like 1 of the kids. Still do at sometimes because I had one parent came the other day. Fridays dressed down, so I had on jogging suit and I just had my hat on because we were doing something, a pep rally or something, and one of the parents had came up to the room. I said yes send the parent up, you know, I gotta give her the child's packet because they were suspended. So the parent came in there and me and the kids were doing something. I'm in the groove with them. I'm not at my desk. I'm never at my desk, so unless it's something important. The parent was like is. Ms Ivy here and the kids laughing, right? It's like she's right here and the parent was like. That's one of the parents never came to teacher conference. So and it was just funny. You know, there's like, oh, I would have pegged you for one of the kids. I said I get that all the time. It's no problem. No problem. So, yeah.

01:08:06

DM

So just maturity just above all.

01:08:09

Tam Ivy

Knowing the ins and outs. What to say. What not to say. How to play the game.

01:08:15

DM

OK, OK. OK. Well, when I say the word Wellness, what comes to mind?

01:08:21

Tam Ivy

Massages. That's my go to massages. I like those, especially when I was in a car accident and I still have my back issues, so that works for me. And soothing music. A glass of wine every now and then. Vacations.

01:08:48

DM

To the music you do, what's to the music to you?

01:08:53

Tam Ivy

Jazz, jazz, even a live band. I want to relax. I'll go to a live, go see a live band or I just have a concert in my house, put on some jazz music. Keep it moving. Clean up the house. Another Wellness for me is getting my basic checkups. Making sure you know everything's good. I try to eat healthy. I was a Pescatarian for about 2 1/2 years and I went back. To being a carnivore and my downfall, I don't really exercise like I should, but I try to at least do 2-3 times a week and being that my back is an issue. And then I found I just found out I have chronic hives. So I found this exercise on YouTube. Kiato, but it's like 7-15 minutes of exercise. You're standing and it's just working on your core. I find that I love that and Zumba. I like Zumba too, so I would do that at least 2 to 3 * 2 to three times a week, even if it's for 5 minutes at least. I'm getting something in.

01:10:15

DM

Yeah. Yeah. UM. So you told me about some of your experiences engaging in Wellness, like your massages, your dance and your Zumba's. Uh, what about unwellness? Do you think there are some things you do that might keep you unwell?

01:10:30

Tam Ivy

Eating ice cream all the time, all year. All year round. I mean drinking pop, which is what yall call soda, I say pop. I've been back on that. I was off of that for a good long time.

And well stress. Letting the job stress me. When I know if it's not gonna get better and it's just not gonna get done leave it to the next day. You know, so stress is an. Unwellness that I try to control.

01:11:03

DM

How is your job? So teaching, sometimes makes you unwell, you think?

01:1:10

Tam Ivy

Umhm. Just dealing with the pressures and then I, our building is like. The HVAC system, they put a band aid on it all the time. So it's the building its not well kept, you know, so. That's unwell for your health. When the heat is on in the summertime, the air is on in the winter time or during the day it can be heat. During the afternoon. Morning it could be heat. Afternoon to be air conditioned or vice versa. The key is not keeping the classrooms clean, you know, or the bathrooms clean. Because they're short staff on the janitors or whatever so. That's can contribute. To your health.

01:12:03

DM

Do they ever? What about like your breaks and things? Do they ever? Like take your break.

01:12:07

Tam Ivy

We only had 25. Yeah, we only had 25 minutes.

01:12:10

DM

And they take those things sometimes. And what did they make you do? During those 25 minutes.

01:12:15

Tam Ivy

Either you're in. A meeting. Or they let. The kids come back from lunch early because it's a brawl they're having. A food fight or something. We don't get our full 30-35 minutes. 20-25 minutes, sometimes 15.

01:12:36

DM

How does that impact you? How does that does that make a difference in your day?

01:12:39

Tam Ivy

Yeah! Because I be evil. I aint eaten, I aint have time to eat. Or I had to scarf down my food. It it just makes me it makes me just blame the kids just because y'all, you know, so yeah. That's my unwellness.

01:13:00

DM

Yeah. So what were your willingness practices like when you first started teaching?

01:13:04

Tam Ivy

I would go ballroom dancing. Yeah, I'll do that. Dancing. That's basically what I would do and hang out with my girls. At the bars, happy hours? Yeah, and do happy hours for the teachers. That's basically did a lot of dancing. That was my cardio. That's how I kept in shape.

01:13:31

DM

So it sounds like it's evolved.

01:13:32

Tam Ivy

It's involved. It is involved. I haven't did ballroom in a while. Every time I go back home now, I would go to the club. Y'all, let's go you know, do that. So now I try to do that since I'm department head for social studies. When we have our meetings once a month, I try to have an outing for us once a month as well. Like to go do the archery, bow and arrow thing or knife throwing. So we did. We just did dinner. The other month in December, we did the dinner. January we haven't did anything but this month we're going to a seminar, a workshop, and then we're going to go to dinner after that. So that's going to be our little thing. That's going to be our department meeting.

01:14:25

Just briefly, can you describe, like any entertainment, you had growing up like, what kind of music you listened to. Or the Internet, anything?

01:14:38

Tam Ivy

Entertainment was the old school rap because LL is my favorite rapper. My mom would take me to see Alvin Ailey got to buy a ticket for next week. Alvin Ailey, we would go do that. She would take. Take us to back then, Chuckie Cheese. UM. She'd take us shopping, skating, bowling. We used to be on a bowling league. So we would do, you know, sports things and just cultural things. Should take me to a museum because, you know, I was a history person. I love social studies all my life. Ever since I was little, so she would take me to the different museums. So that was our little outing entertainment. Sit down, have dinner, actually have family dinners. Watch the Cosby show. Different world. Little show. Yeah, yeah.

00:15:36

DM

Do you have any social media? Are you active?

01:15:39

Tam Ivy

On social media, I'm on Facebook, but I don't do Facebook that much.

01:15:43

DM

Or just no tick tock. No Instagram's, no.

00:15:52

Tam Ivy

No, I don't do that Tik Tocking like I tell the kids on their Instagram.

001:15:56

DM

But you said you're not really active on Facebook?

00:15:57

Tam Ivy

No, I just don't know every now and then.

01:15:58

DM

OK, OK. Well, that's the end to our first interview. We're going to go ahead and transition into our second one. OK. Would you like to take? A break or anything.

01:16:07

Tam Ivy

Oh yes, ma'am.

*****Intermission*****

DM

I do need to get up and stretch. Oh ok. I have a hike scheduled for today.

Tam Ivy

A hike.

DM

Hike about two 2:30. Yeah, I like the hike. That's a part of my wellness. Uh huh.

Tam Ivy

I would go up to Kennesaw Mtn and then he would run me a nice hot bath

DM

Yeah, I haven't had Kennesaw in a while, but.

Tam Ivy

Would are you hiking today?

DM

Today it's called the Harriet hike. Like a Harriet Tubman hike. And they're having this author Tricia Percy, who wrote a book called The Nap Ministries. And she talked about she talks about like, black women eat the wrist, like why rest is resistance and revolutionary for us. And so she's going to be talking there today during the hike. So we're hiking in Atlanta on the West side of Atlanta. Yeah, I've never been there before, but it's like a whole. Event thing. You know and and. Listen to her talk about why rest is important.

Tam Ivy

And you know another thing for me. I'd like to do is go to. Like women empowerment sessions by my cousin in Birmingham. I think I'll be interviewing. Haven't heard.

DM

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I love being in community. Because like you say, it's so much to learn from, you know, talking with black women, learning about the experiences, learn where we overlap, where we differ you. Know open your mouth.

Tam Ivy

And even if I don't use your. Like when they give out tips and stuff.

Tam Ivy

Even if I don't use your tips at. Least I know I wrote it down I. Can go back, yeah.

DM

Knowledge is power.

Tam Ivy

Like one of my coworkers, she's having a black Expo business black business showcase today at noon at the Holiday Inn at Stone Crest School. She didn't put a time when the end, so just like, OK, so what's going on? What I said I already. Have previous engagement. I'll try to make it. I ain't making.

DM

No promises. You got too long, too much longer. But yeah, that's good I went. Over to Black Wall Street for the. First time like November. Cause you know I live all way out. Club so. It's a ride. I like it. I like. That's just the whole vibe. It looks like I'd. Like to see us trying to trying to do. Something to help ourselves.

Tam Ivy

Yeah, but don't be having your stuff all that expensive. That's just like at the first.

DM

That's a whole nother.

Tam Ivy

That's like the black soul food restaurants you candy, for example. The what's the one, blaze?

DM

Old Lady gang or blaze?

00:00:01

Tam Ivy

Why should stuff have pricing on it? Old lady can't and all.

00:00:01

DM

That either I know 20-30 dollars for one little this is 1. This is 15 dollars \$12.00 plate ain't gotta be 30.

Tam Ivy

But start off where it's affordable. Then you can go up later if it's all that. But it's not all that. It's just on your name that's all, it's not consistent, because I went before those. OK. I'm gonna give it one more. I try to give it one more try. Well, yeah. I mean, we just got to start building. We got to talk to each other more though, and be so afraid, you know, to get that feedback and really do the work based on the feedback, we really just lost over it. Yeah. Ego, ego, ego.

01:21:01

DM

OK. So we're going to move into interview two and we're going to talk about the pandemics and activism.

DM

01:22:15

All right. So we're going to go over it, go right ahead into it for interview two again. Today is February 11th and it is 12:47. All right, so. Tell me about your most memorable experiences in school as a student.

01:22:39

Tam Ivy

In 8th grade singing in 8th grade graduation. Leaving the song. Why I can't think of the song. It's coming as a blank. But I remember wearing this red dress for graduation and leading the song, and everybody was in tears. That was memorable. In tears. But I mean. I guess we were in tears too, because we were leaving. It was a Catholic school I went to from 3rd to 8th grade. And we were so tight. And we were all going to public school, different public schools. And so, like, we were crying because of that. And then I was crying because I was actually singing. And, you know, my mom was proud, you know, because I led a solo. So it was cool.

01:23:30

DM

Was it an all girls Catholic school? But you didn't grow up Catholic, though?

01:23:37

Tam Ivy
No.

01:23:43

DM

Perfect. Thanks. Let's see. What about your experiences as a student thinking about life, pandemics. So by pandemics, I'm talking about racism, sexism, white supremacy. Did you have any experiences with those things as a student?

01:23:56

Tam Ivy

To be honest, no I didn't. Even though I went to Central Michigan and was predominantly all white, but they had the Black Union, you know, different things like that, I really didn't experience it because the history teacher I had, I still keep in touch with him. One of them, he one was white and. One was black. The black one died couple of years ago. Years ago he was cool. He was my mentor. But Mr. but Doctor Hall. Who was the white? The white one, that was the department head of the history department at CMU. He helped me. He helped me when I was having trouble taking the Michigan certification test for history because it I mean it is. It's rigorous, it reminds you of the New York one they have. Because Michigan certified teacher certification is accepted in all states as well, and I was like Doctor Hall, I cannot pass this history test, I keep. First, I'll miss about one point, then I missed it about 10 and 20. And he said, well, Tamara, he said it's history, right. I said yes. He said, well what? You have so many credits you can do the social studies. He said won't you take the social studies test and then go to the Community College and just take 9 credits? To make it a full social studies thing. I said OK. So I did that and I. You know, buck the system, as you say. So I didn't experience because all of them were for us, you know. They wanted to help when they said they wanted to help us in any way they could. They truly meant that.

01:25:44

DM

OK. How did you know you? Wanted to be a teacher.

01:25:47

Tam Ivy

My great grandmother, she had a stroke. So she they wanted to put her rehab and I was like grandma. You don't have to put Granny in rehab. I'll teach her. Because I used to always have my dolls and the chalkboard down in the basement teaching. And so I my grandma. Rehabilitated her. And that's when I knew she, she's persevered through. I was like, oh, I could do this for real?

01:26:15

DM

And how old were you again?

01:26:16

Tam Ivy
I was probably 8 or 9. Eight or nine, yeah.

01:26:20

DM

Ok. You had it on your heart. On your heart at an early age.

01:26:27

Tam Ivy

Yeah, yeah. And it's every time I try to get out. Of education improves, I go right back.

01:26:34

DM

OK, tell me about some of your best days as a teacher. Like just some of your best days. What goes on, on your best day as teaching?

01:26:49

Tam Ivy

We're joking with each other. They're laughing at me because I'm trying to do the new dances they doing, or if I say something that's in their slang. When a student really gets it and that light bulb goes off and they just write and then asking me questions, but I do it like this or even when I have some of the students come up and teach the class, I said be me for a day. And before they be me, for they act like me first. They're like, yall know when Miss Ivy doing this, this and that. And I have to laugh myself. I said cause you got it right. Oh I just do sound like that? I do that like us, they. Watch so and then they'll teach for a day, you know, they'll be the teacher. So that's one of my best days, when they're all in synch and I don't have to repeat myself 1000 times. That's one of my best days.

01:27:44

DM

Do you think it they all get In Sync at a certain period during the year? When?

01:27:50

Tam Ivy

It's spurts. It's in spurts.

01:28:0

DM

Because you have my semester. Right? Oh, yeah, you don't have them the whole school year.

01:28:15

Tam Ivy

I have them in semesters, but they're In Sync, especially around this time like Black History Month. And then the girls. Really, women's History Month.

01:28:20

DM

Which is what next month.

01:28:27

DM

What about? I think we kind of hit that one. So talking about well your some of your less favorable days as a teacher.

01:28:37

Tam Ivy

We already hit that.

01:28:39

DM

What are some rules you live by as a teacher.

01:28:42

Tam Ivy

That the teachers forever a student. To bring on and knowledge to the children, that's what always be a be a learner. Be a student. Don't ever think you're just a teacher all the time. You can always learn from your students.

01:29:01

DM

In a circle. Tell me about your different teaching experiences. Which ones were your favorite? Which ones were like? I'd never go back to that school ever again in life.

01:29:14

Tam Ivy

I guess my most favorite. When I was back home in Detroit teaching because that's where. But it was a. Different time too. That's where I had most of. My students, they were willing.

01:29:28

DM

That was the 90's.

01:29:29

Tam Ivy

Yeah, they were willing in mine and would do anything. You know.

They were more respectful than this day and age. I mean, you had your ones that were disrespectful and everything. Everything wasn't peachy, but it was tolerable and you had some support now. They just let them do anything. The experience I'm getting where I'm at now,

01:29:52

DM

when you say some support, what you mean?

01:29:55

Tam Ivy

you have support from the admin and you had support from the district on the Central Office level. Now I'm not saying that. So that was one of my. Best ones and we could go, we could do. More field trips, you know it. Wasn't all these restrictions? Back in the 90s when I was teaching in Detroit, it wasn't. It's just wasn't so many of those many restrictions, they had restrictions, but. Yeah, you have restrictions, but it was more free. And it was more money for the title one schools then. And the schools I was at back home, they managed the money better. So and we have a lot of more of the community coming into the school. Giving money. But its, like I said, it depends on what school you were at too. But the schools, alright. Yeah, we flourished.

01:31:01

DM

Did you go back and teach at the high school you went to, went to another neighborhood?

01:31:07

Tam Ivy

I couldn't. Nobody wanted to leave. I went to King High School and funny. I'm teaching at King here. But King High School was one of the top ten schools in Michigan, and nobody wouldn't leave there. And then my Catholic school, they weren't paying no money. And they had closed. So I taught at the revival school.

01:31:32

DM

OK, OK. When you hear the word. Activism. What comes to mind?

01:31:45

Tam Ivy

Power again. Power power to get rights. You know, black, Black lives matter. I'm not really involved in activism like that, but I do support it. And like when our kids are trying to, I guess this could be activism too, when a couple of our students are trying to get different clubs into the school and they ask for sponsors. So I would sponsor something like that. So I guess it is, yeah. Yeah, because one of the kids asked me to be sponsor of some history, Black women? Something. I know they want to do it next month I was like, OK, it's like cause we know you mentor girls, OK? So yeah, I'm involved in stuff like that. My first year at King here, I was director for The CSK Girls Mentor group. I did that for about a year, and then I didn't do it no more, because the reason I didn't do it anymore, because the assistant principal that was the sponsor for it. Too much micromanagement and she picked me out of everybody to run it. But if you want me to run it, let me run it. I don't like to be micromanaged when it comes to stuff like that, especially when I'm getting the people in, you know, so.

01:33:15

DM

So, like she would come like to the meetings or try to tell you. What y'all need to discuss?

00:33:18

Tam Ivy

She wasn't at none of the meetings and still trying to tell you what to do.

01:33:22

DM

Even involved really, but trying to have a hand.

01:33:27

Tam Ivy

Because I had one of the ladies when I went to the church over here called Excel, she was the. She did Zumba. And I had her come in because we had a health week or something and had the girls do that. I have pictures from there. I can give you pictures of that too. I did that and I was trying to get somebody else in and something. She was like, no. You don't have to pay them I don't know it was the whole thing.

01:34:01

DM

And this is the community.

01:34:04

Tam Ivy

Girl. I don't know, Im just not doing it because when I have been director of mentor programs in Baltimore, at my church, I went to there that I had joined, called Set the Captives Free with Karen Bethea. She's awesome. Awesome preacher. I was director there for about three years. I was a mentor first and then they saw my potential and so they were like, won't you take over for? I forgot that Lady name. Take over for her because she recommended you because she has to leave and you be part of it. I said OK and she said you form a team, so I did the girls and parents loved it. And it's bad when they were like, since you took over, it was better than what, Minister Dana what minister Dana was doing. And then so after the three years Miss Dana wanted to back rest her soul she just passed away a couple of months ago to. She came back and they took it. She took it over and appears some of the parents, I still talked to, and it went down. It went down Sister Tam. It went down. The girls had so much fun. And the girls did too they said, you know, we don't want you. They cried. They had me crying. They was like we don't want you and Ms. Monique to leave me. We did their makeup. Because they had, they did their makeup, they made makeup. Polish. I mean, it was like an entrepreneur thing. These girls were talented. You know, we took them out, showed them how to do etiquette. You know, we dressed up, we went to the plays, different things. And the parents, I mean, when I tell you, Danie, the parents was throwing us money. We had so much money we didn't know what to do, so we started having like little banquets, you know for them but let me run it. It'll be OK. Im not trying to hurt nobody.

01:36:00

DM

That's activism. OK, that is. And you were, it sounds like you were empowering them as well to see themselves in a different way as entrepreneurs. Like you already have something inside you

that's special and important and powerful, and it sounds like you were supporting them and bringing those things out.

01:36:16

Tam Ivy

Because we would do vision boards every year and I said if you get one thing on your vision board that you did for the year, you are a success. You got to celebrate the little victories. Not always the big victories like you gotta pay off the small bills and then hit the big bills.

01:36:38

DM

That's a real tip. It's a real tip.

01:36:40

Tam Ivy

Because I have to say that out loud. To myself too, sometimes.

01:36:48

DM

That's the truth. That's the truth. Well, let's think about this because I know you say you started teaching in the 90s. I it just came to me that I think Columbine was like 99. Did that change your teaching or what happened in schools or? Because you're in mostly black schools, I know that was a different setting.

01:37:12

Tam Ivy

It didn't really and I hate to say it. I didn't change me, but I just made sure the kids didn't. It didn't change. It made the admin the district, changed some of their policies, though as far as that. But I've been in basically black schools and you had a we had a couple of others in our schools, especially in Baltimore, but Baltimore, is like a melting pot. So but, and it was the tripped out part. God always put me in these underserved schools. That's the thing. And my thing used to be God, why are you doing this to me? Can I be in a school that got money and doing what they supposed? Yeah, but I finally just come to realize that's just not my calling. I need to be right there in the trenches

01:38:09

DM

Yeah, yeah. UM. When talking about activism, I was also thinking about like lesson plans, writing the lessons that you teach and how you teach those lessons. Because you know, of course having this conversation about CRT, all these different things going on in the world, do you think that any of your activism shows up in your teaching? Like anything with a district like would feel.

01:38:37

Tam Ivy

Umhm, even teaching history, even though I'm not teaching you U.S. history this semester, I will be when the nine weeks is up but, it's to their curriculum. But at my school with the principal we have freedom to do, and I tell the kids black U.S. history is black history. And I always incorporate black history in it, and I've been since teaching econ and personal finance, I include blacks in it, some type of history in it. So that would be my form of activism, because sometimes they don't even want you to include those things in there and I give kids more than what they supposed to. In that in. I don't. I write it in my Lesson plan, but they don't know. It's in my lesson, but they don't know if I'm talking about that person or this person when I'm talking about both.

01:39:51

DM

Well, why do you why do you have to write? Do you think you have to? Write it like that.

01:39:54

Tam Ivy

No. He gives me the freedom that I don't have to write it like that, but I do. Just in case the powers that be want to come in.

01:40:04

DM

Like the district, come down?

01:40:05

Tam Ivy

Yeah yeah. The district come in and then be like that's not to the standard cause you know you have some of those people. So I just write it to cover my butt.

01:40:17

DM

But so that's like some real that you have to kind of worry about when you sit down?

01:40:20

Tam Ivy

Umhm. And just like now, they're talking about, you know, the race thing. You can't. I'm still gonna teach it, but I get a I know ways to get around it, and as long as I can prove evidence in my standards that is in the standard. Because when we're talking about simulations, when I'm doing the middle passage, I always do a simulation and the simulation is I had the kids. I'm going to show you. I had the kids stand up. We get in the hallway. It's always on videotape in the hallway and they laugh. The security will be laughing like that's Ivy doing that middle passage again, so I had the kids like stand up and I'm like, spread your arms out, get the space and then I'll tell them to turn and then I'll say put your hand on that person's shoulder, those are the chains. Right. So that's the way I get, you know from it. And then when we're on the floor, I say get on the floor and then I'm like, lock your legs up. And go like this. You know, that's how they were rotating on the ship. And I'll have it doing when they're standing up to. So I'll be like lock up and then I'll be like, try to go, right. Try to go left. That's how it was, those are the chains and they

get it. They don't get offended. I even did it with a couple of white kids at a school in Baltimore and they got it. The kids went and when one of the parents asked, she would always ask what was Ms. Ivy teaching today and one of the kids was like, she told us about how, you know, the slaves were chained up and we did a lesson on it. He did it real politely. She had us, you know. You know, acting like we were really on the slave ship or whatever. And she was like oh. You know, and that's and that's the time when I don't know if you heard when one of the teachers in Baltimore, I think it was in one of the county schools it wasn't in the city of Baltimore actually did the simulation, and she actually had chains. Did you hear about that?

01:42:19

DM

I missed that one. But I'm looking it up, I'm gonna look it up.

01:42:22

Tam Ivy

Girl, it was something. It was something to that effect. And I was like, she didn't have to do that. There's ways around to get through that. And she was white.

01:42:32

DM

Oh, and she was white too, and she chained the children OK. Well

01:42:38

Tam Ivy

And they were white kids. Like. Really?

01:42:48

DM

Well. OK, OK. Well, we're transitioning to the to the to the end of our time together. Just have a couple more questions for you. Could you provide 3 words to describe your self-care journey?

01:43:05

Tam Ivy

3 words, to describe my self-care journey? Relaxing. Bright. Calmness.

01:43:23

DM

OK. UM. Now thinking about the past three years, the pandemic. Tell me about some experiences that have brought you joy in connection to teaching. Hold on, this is horrible. It's horrible interviewing, but I'm I have another question before we even get to that. Take me back to March 2020 when you were teaching the whole week. And then I think that Friday they might have come and said, so we're going to go virtual. What were you thinking in March? 2020

01:44:05

Tam Ivy

So that was the 1st? Yeah, cause I was like why we're going virtual. You know, they didn't tell us first. And then I was like, y'all didn't give us training on this I mean, they gave us a little bit

before we left because I knew they knew something was coming up. And I'm like. OK. So really we're going to be virtual. We don't have that much training on it, but we're going to work through this, but the kids not going to log on, they're going to be sleep.

01:44:35

DM

Did they all have laptops?

01:44:36

Tam Ivy

Yeah, they made sure. They have their laptops before they left. But, they gonna be sleep. The parents aren't gonna be uh, making sure they get up. That was my thought, you know, so. But what to get to your other question, what brought me joy during that era? I think it was the joy to let the parents see how we feel. We're teaching. We're trying to get it together and we have to be with your child all day. That was a joy. And then they gave me a chance to try out new programs that they were giving out for the students to learn, and for the teachers to learn and teach the students through, like kahoot, I didn't play Kahoot that much. Now girl, Kahoot me and Kahoot are best friends. Quizlet, QuizIz. Here's those different programs. And another thing that brought me joy. To not have to drive to work.

01:45:40

DM

Very true. Very true, very true. OK. What about the opposite?

01:45:49

Tam Ivy

The opposite I mean I have miss being face to face because I'm a hands-on person. I really don't like virtual, I really don't. Because they're not getting that one-on-one and then they're really not being supervised. Miss being with the other, you know my other colleagues on Facebook. Just don't like virtual.

01:46:13

DM

Like community.

01:46:15

Tam Ivy

Community. Yeah, I'm a people person and some people like being virtual. They like that isolation. I don't. I don't like that isolation. We weren't brought up like that, so. And God doesn't want us to be isolated so.

01:46:33

DM

So thinking about your Wellness right, your self-care how often in a week are you giving given space at school to brightness your Wellness? So, remember, you said well, it's like listening to your music or dancing or.

01:46:48

Tam Ivy

Yeah. On my planning, when I actually don't have to be in a meeting or watching somebody's class.

01:46:53

DM

So in a week, how often might you actually, get your planning. Out of that.

01:46:57

Two out of five. Girl, it's bad. And a lot, you know, a lot of. Teachers are quitting. And so we have to take up other classes and then some teachers are taking off for mental health days, and I don't blame them. So, we have to cover the classes and things, but if we're doing that, I don't mind. But you need to pay me. Extra.

01:47:27

DM

And they don't?

01:47:30

Tam Ivy

You know they don't and if they do, you have to be responsible to put it in, and it's only \$15. An hour. With everything, what that \$15 supposed to do?

01:47:41

DM

After taxes, that's five.

01:47:43

Tam Ivy

That was 15. Now that was two years ago now. We're supposed to be 30.

01:47:50

DM

Eggs cost \$8 for a dozen.

01:47:54

Tam Ivy

So our classes are 90 minutes. So we have 4 classes, well 4. Three classes per teacher or whatever, so you only give me \$30 per hour for the 90 minutes. It is per day. For when you take over that class.

01:48:17

DM

\$30.

01:48:19

Tam Ivy

So with that being said. That's why there's only two. If that, and then if I do have the class and I don't have to yell at the class, tell them to calm down. Your teacher didn't leave you nothing, so just be on your phone and be quiet. Don't FaceTime. You can text. Leave me alone. Let me do what I got to do.

01:48:45

DM

Yes, that's. Sorry to hear that. Really sorry to hear that.

01:48:53

Tam Ivy

Or and then my lunch. For 25 minutes.

01:48:57

Tam Ivy

I won't go. I won't stay in my room. Some teachers stay in their room and eat. umum I go down to the the sub person that does the sub and we have lunch in her room where it's quiet and she has this aromatherapy thing going on. I'll be in there.

01:49:16

DM

Get your Zen on. Get your peace.

01:49:17

Tam Ivy

Or if I want excitement, I go sit at the security desk with the security guard and watch him work and laugh because its characters coming in the building.

01:49:29

DM

I'm sure.

01:49:30

Tam Ivy

So that's another. Type of stress? Really.

01:49:33

DM

So you just told me about some of your tools. Your tools are going to go sit somewhere else and you know some aromatherapy and.

01:49:43

Tam Ivy

Give my laughter on the comedy show, you know.

01:49:48

DM

Do you do any like journaling or meditations or yoga? Or anything like that.

01:49:52

Tam Ivy

I do devotions in the morning and sometimes I journal I journal. I slipped off on that. But mainly it's just devotions right now in the morning, and I try to do some more devotions at night before I go to bed.

01:50:07

DM

OK. When you hear the word spirit. What comes to mind?

01:50:12

Tam Ivy

The Holy Ghost. Something that's not driving, it's like a when I know something aint right? It's like that woman intuition being with the Holy Spirit in which I need to pay more attention to.

01:50:32

DM

UM. How does how does Spirit manifest or show up in your teaching?

01:50:38

Tam Ivy

When I'm passionate about something and a couple of times that the students have seen me like shed a tear for a minute and they're like, what's wrong? So I just had a moment, you know? So that's how it usually shows up. Basically, when I'm passionate about something you know?

01:51:0

DM

Tapped in like they say.

01:51:04

Tam Ivy

Umhm. Or even when the student tells us when we have our Mondays circles and Monday circle. So a Monday circle is like a check in the kids will tell you about their day. Their weekend rather and then we'll have little questions. We'll have four questions, and you pick a student and they'll start a question and giving them an example. So if a student tells me something that's really heart felt, then yeah, that's when the Spirit shows up too. I find out that's when I'll mostly be talking about, you know, you a child of God. Don't let that hurt you. And the kids like. Oh, OK.

01:51:45

DM

That sounds like some activism too? Some spiritual activism. Got to be ready to be in the army out here. Can you tell me about some good experiences you've had in reference to race?

01:52:05

Tam Ivy

I had a nice fine looking white man. Buy me breakfast, he my girlfriend, and I we're in Kentucky. We had just left the Boney James concert girl. So we were leaving to go back. She's leaving to go back to Detroit, I'm leaving to go back to Georgia, and we was at Cracker Barrel of all places, and we having breakfast and we just, well he wasn't really fine- fine. We sit and talking and having a good time and she's like, why's that white man keep looking at us. I said, I don't know, girl. We fine. It's OK. And so he came over there said I'm sorry. He said. Do you all mind if I pay for your breakfast this morning and she looked at me, I said I don't mind go ahead and she says I can't take you nowhere. And he came and he said you are too beautiful women. And he was like, and y'all just sitting over there talking. He said I was observing, y'all was just having such a good time. So I felt like I just needed, something came across my soul. I felt like I needed to pay for your breakfast. I said, well, thank you, Sir. Have a blessed day. And he came back with his check to show that he paid for, you know, that he wasn't playing and he paid for it and that's when I was like thank you, Sir. Have a blessed day appreciate it. And my friend, she's like, OK, I cant take you nowhere. She's like, remember couple years ago or especially when we was in college and you all, we'd always go out after dinner or whatever, and somebody always paying for our food. And so I said, yeah. Girl, I still got it!

01:58:381

DM

It's always good to know. Still looking good. Yes indeed. Do you have any? Negative experiences just in your whole life concerning race.

01:53:57

Tam Ivy

I can't think of words off hand. I mean, you might want to count this as it was with my own people at a school district. One of my first years I was at the high school in Detroit and one of the little boys, I fought. We were, I was doing hall duty. And I told I told C, I said don't come down this hallway unless you have a pass. He was coming in and he was like Bitch! Yeah. You know, so he's like 511. I'm 5'4 in some heels. And he was in my personal space, and he was "Bitch this" and he hit me. During this thing I blacked out. I beat his butt. It took because I had. I was teaching English, and it was the Shakespeare class. I will never forget because I had them kids rolling. And the football players, it was in my first period Shakespeare class. It took three of the football players and security to get me off that boy. That's how bad I blacked out. And so of course, charges were pressed because come to find out, he was high. Him and his momma had just got through fighting. They called his mom and she came and she said Ms. Ivy, press charges on him because I just got through beating his butt too, and he shouldn't be coming up there disrespecting you. And I said yeah, because all I told him was don't come down this hallway unless you have a pass. That's it. And so the administrators. They were males, one of the male administrators he gave me a pink slip, he said You can no longer work here at O and I'm like, why? I was self defending myself. I'm little and the kids were, you know, the kids have my back because the kids beat him up when they when he finally got out of jail, they beat him down, so I

was like, so why am I getting punished? And they was like (rawraw), I was like OK, whatever. So that's when I left Detroit Public Schools. That's one of the reasons. So I was like if this was one of the white teachers y'all wouldn't have did that and it was white teachers there and he didn't say anything, so I guess. Because they did have a teacher, it was a black student and a white teacher had an altercation. And they didn't do anything to him. They just put him on suspension for a couple of days. But then too it was self-defense in his case as well so. That's the only thing I ever experienced. And at a restaurant, it took forever for the white waitress to come over and serve us. And she went to everybody else instead of us until I said something to the manager and the manager got on her. I mean, that's sad, and needless to say I don't leave her a tip. I left her a penny for her thoughts. So yeah, those are only two experiences I had.

01:57:17

DM

OK. So this is a two-fold question. Can you describe the reasons why you decided to participate in the oral history study on black women teacher activist?

01:58:31

Tam Ivy

It's something new. Different. I want to be involved in something that makes sense. And probably helps somebody out that may have had some experiences that I have had and just give my story told. Its like a form of therapy for me.

01:57:51

DM

You feel like do you feel like maybe? A lot of people don't listen to black women teachers?

01:57:58

Tam Ivy

Umhm. We're not heard. We're not heard. Were sure not respected. But we're not heard because they just dump everything on education. Education needs to be paid like our football players.

01:57:15

DM

I agree. I agree. Do you notice, because you you've taught for quite a while, do you notice a difference from when men come in to teach then when women come in to teach? Like as far as like moving up the ladder or, you know, want to become principals or getting to administration.

01:58:33

Tam Ivy

I haven't really paid attention to that because most of mine was the female competition, the females moving on when I wanted to get a certain, you know, advance is always who you know. If you're in a sorority. I'm not in a sorority. So. It's never been male female, for me, it's always been female for me

01:59:00

DM

And black women specifically, not any White women, but black women. OK, well, could you please share? Oh, no, no, before I say that, what do you want future black women teachers to know.

01:59:10

Tam Ivy

That they do matter, and that when you're having a bad day, just always think about to your first time what made you wanting to go into teaching. And just be diligent with be consistent. That's it. And love yourself first. Always love yourself first. Might not get the love in the system or the school system, but love yourself first. So be diligent, consistent, and love yourself.

01:59:51

DM

All right. Well, could you share any other thoughts or feelings we have not shared about your attitude about teaching Wellness activism, living in the pandemic? Anything else?

02:00:03

Tam Ivy

Just go for your dreams, even if it's outside of education. Go for your dreams. You can always leave and come back. I did it plenty of times. Twice to be exact.

02:00:18

DM

Well, I thank you.

Tam Ivy

Thank you. This is fun.

DM

I thank you so much for your time. I appreciate you talking with me. And I will be in contact to share the transcripts. OK, from our conversation. So yeah, alright. That was.

Tam Ivy

I hope I answered your question, yes.

DM

It's just what you think. I just want to hear what you think. Yeah, that was wonderful. I really appreciate you taking time just to be honest and. Hopefully this helped you kind of think about. You've taught for a long time. Hopefully it reminds you of like just. All the goodness, all the things you've learned all the places you've been.

02:01:01

Tam Ivy

You made me think about some. Most of the good stuff. And some of the bad stuff, like, I don't do it no more, but still, I mean it helped, it helped.

02:01:12

Tam Ivy

It was. Good. It was good cleansing. I'm glad. I'm glad.

SJ Educate

Interview 1, March 14, 2023 at SJ Educate's house

00:00:00

DM

All right, so today is π Day 314, March 14th, 2023 1:00 o'clock PM. And I'm interviewing SJ Educate, as she likes to be called. This is for the black women, black woman teacher code project. And my name is Danie Marshall. And let's go ahead and get into it. So again, thank you for joining me today. Today's date is March 14th, and my name is Danie Marshall. This is my first interview with SJ during the Black Woman Teacher Code Research project. How are you?

00:01:21

SJ Educate

I'm well, thank you.

00:01:25

DM

So tell me, what is your name and where were you born? Tell me about your family origin.

00:01:32

SJ Educate

My first name is SJ. I'm originally from Louisiana, a small rural community called Keatchie. UM. Yeah, that's where I'm from. I was born in Shreveport, LA. That's the nearest local major city. And I was born to uh parents, that were married. I have an older sister. We are 10 years apart. I also have an older brother.

00:02:20

DM

OK. Tell me about your family origins, you know what is your ethnic heritage?

00:02:29

SJ Educate

As far as I know, you know, growing up, you know, I would say that we just call ourselves black people. I don't think my mother's family grew up like very religious or anything like that. UM. As far as I can remember, I don't think uh. My mother and her mother got into religion until, like, later on in life or something like that. Like my mom was probably about. Maybe around 30 years old. And my grandmother was probably around 50 years old before they got very religious or in the church. You could say of course, I know about my dad, son, family. I know that they were Baptists. I'm not sure if they were just baptized all the way as far as like his parents and their parents and whatever, but that's as far as I know.

00:03:44

DM

Any traditional family names?

00:03:48

SJ Educate

I'm sure both on both sides of my family, the names come from probably like their slave owners or something and such. Never fully researched those things. UM. Yeah, they have very common. White, white slave owner names like hill, jones, green and Washington. Those are the names that are in my family and paternal and maternal in. Those names are like attached to slavery.

00:04:33

DM

OK. But are there like any traditional family names like, say you had an aunt with this name, then they named a cousin with the same name or?

00:04:42

SJ Educate

Oh well. My grandfather was named after his father. Curtis. It's like it could be, I don't know, like on both sides of the family. Like not a lot of information has been shared. I do know my grandmother named her son after her father. William. She obviously was named. I guess in her father's namesake, because her father's name is William. Her name is Willie. UM. And so she named her youngest child, William. Yeah, that's as far as I know as far as names are concerned.

00:05:27

DM

What does your parents do for a living?

00:05:29

SJ Educate

UM. My mom had, you know. Like retail jobs, she worked for Montgomery Ward. She worked for JC Penney and then after that she worked for about 30, almost 40 years for Tyson, the chicken company. She worked in the plant for almost 40 years. My father, I think he was a welder by trade and then the company that he was working for, I don't know, they went bankrupt or something like that, but they laid a lot of people off like in the early '90s or something like that. They laid people off so, he did things like cleaning banks. He's a janitor. You could say a janitor. Clean banks. He worked at JCPenney as a janitor, custodial duties. Things like that.

00:06:32

DM

And that was in Shreveport for both your parents?

00:06:34

SJ Educate

Oh yeah. This was in Shreveport, but my mom worked at the plant in a place called Carthage, TX.

00:06:41

DM

OK, but you all lived in Louisiana?

00:06:46

SJ Educate

Yes.

00:06:47

DM

Tell me about some. Of your family members, you are proud of.

00:06:52

I can say in recent years I've come to learn more things about my grandfather. My maternal grandfather. I always knew he was a very hardworking man. Uh, he was just like, a very manly man. Didn't take a lot of crap. Didn't really like play any games and things like that, but he was also a kind man. Funny man, kind, not very balanced, I would say but, I learned things about him being like I guess what we would call today like an entrepreneur or whatever. He was someone who employed a lot of young people. People, I guess in his community. Back then, you know the jobs that they would do is. Like you know. You're going to be a farmer or you going to like you know. Go bail hay. You know, things like that. That you would be doing for white people and such. And from what I was told. I think he kind of like, you know, saving his money, get his money up to be able to buy. Trucks to haul logs and things like that. And so, he employed people like his brothers and other young people in the community. And uh did different things like that long haul hauling log trucks. Hay. Bailing hay, and things like that. But you know, doing it for himself. And so I thought that was like uh amazing to learn that you know. He thought about, you know, work being self-sustainable for himself. UM. He and my grandmother had their home built. Like the 1960's and uh to be able to do something like that. That was probably monumental for that time period, you know, especially in the rural community, to be able to. Get a. Let's see what 1, 2, 3, 4-bedroom house built. You know, still small, small bedrooms and things like that, but just to be able to provide something like that for your children. He and my grandmother had eight kids. And so just to be able to provide that was a major accomplishment, I think. And uh, even that was in the wasn't enough room. But you know. It was still something, you know, they went from a very small like shack type of home to be able to build a brick home. And so just knowing that he accomplished those types of things in that time period in the '60s, '50s, where there's a lot of racism going on and a lot of division. Not making a lot of money. I think that that that made me feel proud. Proud to, you know, be his granddaughter and know that, you know, I came from the likes of someone who had some get up and go about themselves and wanted to, you know. Cared about not only you know his family, but other people in the community and wanted to employ other people. And wanting to see other people do good and you and knowing that he encouraged young people. To go to school. And to leave that rural area because it was nothing there. So just hearing those things about him make me feel real good.

00:10:44

DM

Describe your childhood. What were you like as a child? What was it like for you growing up?

00:11:53

SJ Educate

Like I said, I live in a very rural community. So as a small child. I wasn't around a lot of other kids, a lot of the time, and I'm thinking back around, maybe like around the age of five to six. I don't think it was any more kids and my or cousins around my age that live where I live. A lot of my aunts and uncles had moved. So my mother was still living there and so I guess I was just kind of like alone a lot as a small kid before I could go to elementary school. I had to spend most of my days with my great grandmother. That's my grandfather's mother who was still alive then. She would keep me while my mom will go to work. So I spent a lot of my days there. As I was bored, I do remember being bored and only getting to watch like. Uh, Sesame Street. I will get to watch Sesame Street to a certain amount of time and then she was watching her soaps for the rest of the day, pretty much and I would have to eat the same thing every day unless my mom would send me with some little snack, something she might, and she may maybe not, but my great grandmother will cook salmon cakes every day, rice and sugar. UM. Just food I as a as a 5 year old that I just, you know, didn't like I would say, well, I didn't find that appealing. Yeah, that was my existence as a small, small child. And then, you know, I also experienced some trauma there, realizing that, you know, I've got molested there at my grandmother's house when I guess an older cousin would come who would get kicked out of school, you know, from time to time, things like that. And then that, like growing up a little bit more, getting to go to school. You know that's a little bit more entertaining. Get to go to school, be with other kids, learn this and that. But primarily, I live my childhood kind of bored because like I said, it was in any other kids my age that live in that area, it wasn't like. Oh, I'm gonna take you on a play date with somebody like, that's not type of life. I lived with my parents. I think my excitement would probably come for things I would get to do like if I would get to go to, my father was from Shreveport, which was a little bit more highly populated than the rural area that I grew up in. So, I would get to go there, visit with my cousins, have definitely a lot more fun. A lot more experiences. So those things made me happy. There were times periodically when some of my cousins would move back to the rural area. For whatever reason, it would be, and so they would be there for like small periods of time, maybe like 3 months or something like that based on whatever my aunt or uncle or whatever. Moved, moved away or do whatever they do. So those things brought me, joy, just to have kids my age closer or somebody to talk to, play with whatever. My sister is a lot older than me so, we're ten years apart. By the time I made it to 10, she, you know, she's already gone as far as like it's. Age is concerned like 18. I'm 8. She's already out of the house. So like, and we never really got along anyway when I was a kid, so. I was pretty much by myself as a child. And I think because of that. I'm OK with like, you know, spending a lot of time with myself being by myself cause I grew up that way. So I guess to sum it up I would say I had a very lonely childhood or secluded? Or just? You know. It was. It wasn't. It wasn't bad, but, it was uneventful, I would say that.

00:16:05

DM

When is your birthday?

00:16:07

SJ Educate

UM. February 18.

00:16:10

DM

And the year?

00:16:12

SJ Educate

1986.

00:16:17

DM

Well, what are some of your which I think you briefly touched on this, but what are what are some of your fondest memories with your families?

00:17:25

SJ Educate

UM. UM. I don't know. I guess what comes to mind when you say fondest I had well I have a like a favorite one of my favorite aunts on my father's side, my Aunt J, I used to love to get to go spend time with her. Her kids are a little older than me. But uh, not too much out of age range, but uh, I'll get to go there. She's just very sweet. She will love on me. I always gonna cook me something sweet, whether it be a cake, cookies or something she always got. Something that she's gonna make me, or we're gonna make something together, something like that. And getting hang out with my cousins. And hear music do things like that. She Always would be. Playing some kind of record or something like that. I used to love to hear her tell me stories about when she used to. Go to the concerts. Back in the 70s and stuff like that. All the concerts she would go to. Things like that. Dances. She had a lot of stories. They were, uh, those were very fond memories there. I would say. On my mother's side. My fondest memories probably are with my cousin. That I have spent the most time with, probably Adam Brandon. And Kimberly. And this is because like UM. We were just, they were just always doing something funny, always doing something to make. I don't. I don't know. I don't think it's just necessary to make me laugh, but just to bring joy and laughter into almost any situation, especially going to church. Just goofing off like they were very joyful children and like I said, I was a, I was a kid at home by myself so. I just love hanging out with them and laughing and just being a part of that. I think those are probably my fondest memories.

00:19:08

DM

Tell me about where you grew up about the town or the street or. Community what does it look like and it opens.

00:19:16

So it's very rural. Some people would like to say country living. You could say that very rural, a lot of land. Back when I was younger, it was a lot of trees. But you know as these things. Time goes on. You know, they knock a lot of the trees down for oil rigs. People move away. Farmhouses, get torn down, things like that, but. Where I lived, just like a very you know. Patched together Roads. UM, bumpy. Like I said, it's a community called Keatchie, so houses are very spaced apart. So, like where I lived I do have neighbors like that I could probably walk

too like. It would take maybe 10 minutes to walk down my road that leads to my house, to the main driveway to say at least to the main road, and I could walk next door. Which would take maybe about 10 minutes to get from my doorstep to their doorstep. But this is a community like you kind of like, talk to people you know. So like the people that. Live next door was white. Like my grandmother. She lived like walking distance, like 3 minutes. Next door to someone like Miss Gert, you know or whatever. But most of the houses in this community are far apart from each other, maybe half a mile apart from each other. Uh, the store they had a store when I was younger, that was still open. It was probably about. About 3 to 4 miles and it was like a very small General country store. Well, people still where you still could get credit like you can go there and say, hey, let me get let me get \$5.00 with the gas and put it on my on my tab and I'm paying on Friday things like that. You know the country general store is so little cheese meat. You know saltine crackers and things like that. You can get soda water. You can get some chips. Ice pop something like that. At one point they had two of those stores and there was one little store down the street from them. And then I don't know what happened to that store. I think they're closed, but you will go further to another little town called Logansport and that was probably about. At least 10. 10 miles further down the road. And it's bigger, probably about 500 hundred people were there. Give or take. I could be wrong but small high school, small high school, high school, elementary and middle schools all combined in one huge building. It's sectioned out from the elementary side. I think my, the year that I went to 1st grade, that's when the new school had finished, and everybody was able to move into the new school. So I spent my kindergarten year at the Rosenwald School, which had been there for a very long time. Very old school. I think it was part of the schools that were provided for black. Kids or something like that. I'm not sure something like that it's for. It's a Rosenwald school though. And have been there for a very long time. And that was the last year of that school being opened my kindergarten year. And then we went to the. New school. But even though even there Logansport was very small place like we had we had like one grocery store there. I think it was a Piggly Wiggly. They had like a Dollar General. It still is a Dairy Queen there. Which is like a staple in like all these small towns, you have like a Dairy Queen you know all like small Louisiana, Texas towns. There will be a Dairy Queen. Yeah, a little car wash. And the school. I don't think they got a library until like. I don't know. OK, I think I was like maybe in high school they have a library. And it was very, very small. You know, they have a little like you can drive through the town and in in 3 minutes, like getting from point A to point. B. Driving straight through. It's a border town with Texas. So as soon as you cross the Sabine River, you are in Texas. UM. Just local people. Have black and white people. You know very small place.

0025:03

DM

Tell me about your most memorable vacation as a child.

00:25:23

SJ Educate

I don't know about most memorable because I don't have many memories. A lot of memories from that vacation. But I do think that I enjoyed myself. I think I was probably about. Yeah, probably like 8 or 9. Uh, we took a family trip. I don't even remember where we went? Uh, maybe it was Hot Springs Arkansas. I am not sure. I'm not sure where we went, but I do remember. A lot of the families there, well, one of my favorite cousins was there. And I

remember we had a good time. I remember hanging out by the pool. I think I had a good time there on the picture, I looked like I was having a good time. I remember we went swimming and like I said, I probably got to spend time with one of my favorite cousins, so that's probably why I had a good time. But yeah, I guess I wouldn't say we went on that many vacations as a kid. And I have been to Disney World a few times, as a kid, but I don't even think that was that memorable. Even like people say, oh your going to Disney World, your going to have a good time. But it's a lot of walking, it's hot. It's kind of hard to just straight up have a great good time. Going to big parks like that. But I do remember that that vacation, I'm not sure where we went.

00:27:06

DM

You said maybe Hot Springs AR.

00:27:07

SJ Educate

Maye. I'm not sure.

00:27:10

And your mom and dad went.

00:27:12

My mom went. Probably my dad. I doubt it. He was not like really one to be going on a lot of trips and stuff like that but we did like I did go on a trip with my mom, my dad and my on my with my dad's family to California. When I was probably like 3. So I don't remember it, but I've seen the pictures like we went to Disneyland. In California. But I have no memory of that. But I just seen myself in pictures. He went to that, probably because it was his family. UM. Like he would go to stuff like, I guess with his family, like, that's one of the things I guess I did like about my dad's family. Like, they would always get together. Like on weekends or something like that. I don't know. I think it's most of the time it's impromptu. But they did have like, UM, annual family reunions. Had several family reunions, some of them. I didn't go to because they were out of state, but they always had family reunions. So he would go to those things. Yeah.

00:28:33

DM

How did you all get around?

00:28:36

SJ Educate

Both my parents had a car. I remember my dad had, uh, a Duster. Which I now know was like a muscle car. And uh. But I was kind of embarrassed by it. It like it was the old car. It wasn't even bad out of shape, it just looked old. But like it was in perfect condition like it was a green Duster. And which I now know it was a muscle car. I don't know what happened to it. I don't know if my mom sold it or what after my dad died, but he had one of those cars. But uh yeah, they both always had vehicles.

00:29:18

DM

Is there anything else you think I should know about your childhood?

00:29:26

SJ Educate

I don't think so. I I don't remember meeting my brother until I was probably like. 7 or eight. Maybe older than that. I might have been like 9. I don't think so.

00:29:53

DM

Tell me about some stories you have heard about your ancestors.

00:30:02

To be honest. There's not many. Well, I guess when you say ancestors, I'm thinking about people I've never met. Is that what you mean? Yeah, not many. Not many. I remember one time. He spooked me a little bit. I was driving. I was not driving I was riding with my father back from uh, spending time at his mother's house. UM. And I don't know why this story just came to him. He was telling me about he had a dream one time that. My mom's granddad, which would be my which would be my granddad's father. Came to him in the dream and was telling him something and I can't remember how he was telling me when I was young, but I don't know. It freaked me out a little bit weird. Probably because it was dark. Uh, but yeah. I can't remember exactly what he saying, and it seemed like I remember at one point, but now as I'm older, I don't, he told me something that he was telling him when they were doing something like that and he had never met this man. UM. As far as I know, like people tell, I would hear not tell me, but I hear people talk about. My mom's granddad is. I guess. A womanizer? He just you. Know he had different women. And I guess he didn't want to be locked down. So we had a lot that said he had a lot of children. I think someone said he had like at least 15 16 children. I don't even think that my granddad ever had met all of his children. My grandmothers. I mean, well, I've heard people just say they love my grandmother's parents. I guess they didn't want kids at the time that they had her and she gave up. I don't know. I don't know if we can call it gave up, gave up, or she just didn't keep or didn't raise. I will say that people say she didn't raise several of her children.

00:32:31

DM

Your mother's mother?

00:32:33

SJ

My mother's mother. Yes.

00:32:35

DM

Her mother?

00:32:36

SJ Educate

Yeah. My mother's mother. Yeah, my mother's mother's mother. Would be my great grandmother. Did not raise. Several of her children. My grandmother's father. Yeah, just was in the streets. Uh, you know, being a young man, he wasn't trying to raise children as well. But they had him and her had two kids together. And she had several other children by other people. No, they have 3 two children together. No, no, no. They had the two children together and my grandmother met one of her sisters. She met one of her sisters and she knew my uncle, who I call my Uncle Clint, that's her brother. She met those two siblings, but they have several other siblings as well. UM. Yeah, those are all things I've heard about. I don't know. They did for a living. I do know that my mother said my, that her uh her grandmother came. She came back from California or something like that. She was living in California with one of her children. And she came. She came. She said she remembered her coming, like at least two times, and she would spend the. Night with them. And uh, but I don't think. I don't think they have. Like no conversations with substance or nothing that she can remember. But she will come and she will spend the night. Like and she will leave. But I guess maybe just to see her child. Just to see you know. But then she said she don't remember them really having a conversation of like, you know, what's going on or why you raised me or anything like that. You know. Yeah, it's, it's, it's weird. I don't even know where the lady buried at. But I do know her name was Martha Washington.

00:34:48

DM

Are there any traditions from them that you still practice like any traditions from your family as far as holidays or foods or heirlooms that you have or anything you hold on to?

00:35:02

SJ Educate

I think as a person who grew up and left home. I didn't think I didn't really. Uhm, leave home to take any traditions with me. Beyond like, you know, happy birthday, you know. Birthday celebrations and I don't even really celebrate my. Birthday like that but. You know, I grew up in a typical black family, you know, celebrating Christmas. Uh, Easter. UM, Thanksgiving. Normal. Typical things. But like I said, I didn't. Carry those things with me as a. Individual I wasn't at 25 and like, yeah. I'm gonna make Thanksgiving dinner. In in, in. My understanding or the shift and my understanding about Christmas and you know it's ties to religion and all. That kind of stuff. I'm not really into celebrating Christmas. But yeah, because I grew up a respectful child, I always, you know, call my grandmother, call my mother and say happy Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas. Of course. You know, what I'm saying I'm a respectful child. I grew up that way, but it's not something that I hold in my heart.

00:36:34

DM

So you brought up religion when you? Hear the words. Religion and spirituality. What comes to mind?

00:36:44

SJ Educate

UM. If I could put it into words. UM. I was going. To say the two don't mix but. As I've grown in my understanding grown in my own spirituality. And just being in the world, there are some ways that they mix. You know. Because. I understand that. People who were slaves, right? Of course they. Came here with their own traditions and came here with their own spiritual spirituality. I think their religion is just like a man-made construct. That had you know this, that that was created to you know control people. You could control definitely to control them, but at the same time I can understand why some people need religion because. It gives you a guide or it gives you some type of principle to live your life, right? It ain't nothing wrong with that. It ain't for me, but. Ain't nothing wrong with that. What was your question again?

00:38:19

DM

When you hear the word religion and spirituality.

00:38:25

SJ Educate

So religion for me, personally religion is just, you know. Something constructed to tell me how to do? Religion, in my mind, is something constructed that tells me how to do in my mind. Spirituality. That's in my body. That's how I feel. I do what I feel. That's something within me. Nobody has to tell me how. Because spiritual is feeling that it's very fluid, you know? So I think this may be how I separate the two. And I have a very disdainful, bad taste in my mouth about religion. And like I said, I've grown to like ease up on that because I understand why people needed it. Like if I was a slave. And you know I can't do none of the things that I did before I got here. I can't even call myself by my name. Then, you know, you might and say, OK, well, this is the only God that you can praise. You got to say Jesus or something like that. Then I understand putting all that energy into that name, but still within yourself, using that power to, you know, maybe manifest or give you the desire to keep going or something like that. So I can get it. I understand that. But, that's not for me, that's the difference between the two. Like I said, I understand religion a little bit more. I know that everybody ain't out to fool people and to just take money and things like that. Like I get it, there are some good people who are religious like, but I don't think I'll ever be attached to any religion. And for the rest of my life. But you know, who knows what happens?

00:40:31

DM

So. I know you mentioned you kind of had a disdain a bit when you were younger toward religion. How did your loved ones view religion? What was your experience with them?

00:40:44

SJ Educate

So like I said, I was just around like you know. My mother's people I see on a daily basis, my mother, my father, my dad died when I was 10. So up until then, my grandmother. Like I said, uh, these people, I'm just speaking on my mother, my grandmother. They came into religion late and they're like. My mom had me at 30 years old. My grandmother was 50 years old. So OK,

coming up, I guess getting to the age of maybe 6-7 and like maybe having some awareness about what's going on. These people are now very religious. You it's uh. We were going to church. You wearing a dress? Putting on stockings? So like I would say, they view religions as something very. Very sacred, very something very real. Real as in, I stand by this word, I believe in this. Strong faith. What you call the people in the south? Devout? Maybe devout. I would say that.

00:42:15

DM

What church are they going?

00:42:16

A Pentecostal church, Church of God, Christ. So yeah, that's how they viewed it. Like this word is bond this what it is, you know, Old Testament. New Testament then, like man anyway. But. That's how they viewed it. But like, I think even in the early age of awareness, I felt like this some bullshit. Like what? Like everything in this book has to be true. And it makes sense because it's in this book. And I'm just thinking like, as child, who wrote this and who said it's true? Who says that? Thou shall not kill. Thou shall not steal, thou shall not lie. And I think for a child. You go to this place. On Sunday and throughout the week too, right. You, uh, you go to this place and they say one thing, but then you go in the world, you see another. Things you see. Adults lie, you see. Adults cursing. Like it's. Yeah, it's very. I think it's very confusing. But like I said I felt like at a very young age that something just wasn't right with this religion church thing. Like, I don't know what it is, but. It didn't sit well in my spirit as a child. What was your question? You said? How did they see religion? Yeah, so that's how my, my, my grandmother and my momma saw religion. But my granddaddy. UM. He wasn't on that shit. He wasn't going to church. I asked my granddaddy one time when I was little. I was like granddaddy you going to hell heaven. And he was like, Nah, I'm going to hell. So I don't know if he believed in the Bible or if he just feel like me, you know, I'm not doing none of those. I'm not going to live under any of those commandments. I didn't ask him any other questions, but. Yeah, usually he never went to church. Even my grandma would ask him. Though he wasn't going to no church. He didn't, he didn't. Even. He say he didn't want no. Preacher preaching over him at his funeral. I remember him saying that.

00:45:01

DM

Did they have one.

00:45:03

SJ Educate

Uh, of course. I think my uncle. Which Is his brother, preached his funeral.

00:45:09

DM

And He's a preacher?

00:45:10

Yeah, he's a preacher. So he said some. Words, but I don't think he was up there that long because everybody knew my granddaddy didn't want that. Oh, no. My father's side. My father was Baptist, so I don't know how much into religion my dad was, but I do know he would go to church on most Sundays. I don't know how religious he was. I don't know. I really don't. Because he would curse people out while he was driving. Calling people butt holes. So I don't know how much into it he was. But my grandmother was Baptist and she did go to church every Sunday. His mother, she went to church every Sunday. So I never really had a lot of in depth conversations with these people about their religion. She went to church every Sunday. She was nice, church lady. Very giving, lady. Didn't mind feeding anybody. She had a lot of respect in her neighborhood, people would walk down the street and always speak. People kind of cut out the foolishness when they saw Ms. Evelyn. But everybody in the neighborhood, called her Madea. So like she had a lot of respect. People would get themselves together when they walked past my grandma's house. She was always outside in her garden. She liked flowers. She always had flowers in her garden. And she would always be outside waving at everybody saying hello. Things like that.

00:46:54

DM

Tell me about your religious or your spiritual practices?

00:47:01

SJ Educate

At this age. Like I said, I'm not religious but spiritually, you know. UM. I think. When I was coming into my spirituality of just trying to figure out what is this and. What does this mean for me? And how does it look? I think that most of the answers I found out to every everything is like go within. What is it that you feel? Because I remember like. Learning about like you know you can, you know, have these conversations with your ancestors. You know, you can go and sit and meditate and things like that, which were all I think, great things. To put me into practice and give me, you know, give me some understanding. So to answer that it's its's whatever I feel. And so if I feel like I need to get down on my knees and pray then I would do that and that's something that like, like I said, in my understanding, now I'm grown. Because in the past I would associate that to the religion because I've seen people at church do it. I got a bad, just a bad taste in my mouth. Spending a lot of time, you know speaking with my ancestors, talking to them. Giving offering to them rather that be you know money or, you know, some type of food that they might like. Maybe you can play a song that they might like. I always think about my grandmother. When I eat Red Velvet cake. And I always feel bad if I don't leave a little bit or throw some throw something back for my grandmother, because my grandmother loved red velvet cake and she would love to make it. It was like her specialty. People. Uh always wanted her to make it. So that has become a practice like leaving something for them, especially food. Smoking a little refer? My uncle smoked reefer. And so I'm sure they appreciate that when I leave something out for them. My granddad loved to drink beer. Although I can't find the beer he used to drink but. I'm sure they still appreciate those things that really.

00:50:22

DM

Where do you leave these things?

00:50:24

SJ Educate

So I have an altar. I have an altar that on put pictures on with their pictures on it and. Also, I'll put you know different little messages on the altar. This is where like if I do some ritual work with candle or something like that. I might put the message in there and leave it. There at the altar I might ask for help from my ancestors there. So here now I burn incense. You know, make petitions. Have conversations with them. Then ask for help or whatever it is. That I'm seeking. A song that has been has become like a I would say my, my, my spiritual song, my song that Yeah, it's just my song that's become like my spiritual song. Like it's called As Long As You Keep Your Head to the Sky by Sounds of Blackness. And I always play a song from time to time especially when I'm in need or when I'm just like. Going through it mentally. Its become one of my songs that I always play when I'm at the altar. Um, something else would probably be. Oh, I also go in my backyard and have rituals as well. Because those rituals are tied to land. Like where I live. So yeah. That's another practice. UM. And I do this like when I'm at school too like. At school, like I might get some white sage go in there and sage it out, especially at the beginning of the year saging out, you know. Oh, I remember one year uhm. And see there's another way. Another thing that ties back to my room. So I have my one of my good friends. Her mother, who's a Christian lady rest in peace. Miss Pit. But her mother's a Christian lady and she came. She was up there, like, just helping out. Helping my friend with her room. And uh, she was like. You want me to come in here and bless these chairs and bless this room. And pray you're here. And I was like yeah. Coming here, come in here. Do it because I know that. Uh, I know that. Even though I'm not a Christian and all that it's still. It's still there's still power in prayer and still power in in the intention of the words. That that we use. And so teaching the place that I was teaching in, Any uh powerful words or that were going to that would potentially, or prayer that was going to put these kids in a better state I was with. Definitely doing these practices that I do at home I do at school as well. When I go to teach. When the kids come in in the morning, you know, I always have a good song on. And it usually is. Keep your head to the Sky but it's always something motivational. Something makes us feel good. Like Pharell real, I'm Happy. Instrumental on but yeah. Those, those music, the music that's puts us in good vibration. Oh, yeah. I remember when I first started teaching. I always played Bob Marley. I think Bob Marley was a gateway for me to probably tap into my spirituality. Or self, I don't know. He just has a high happy vibration. And so I will always play Bob Marley in my classroom to start the day. And uh. Throughout the day as well, because Black children love to learn and dance. And that's one of the things that I probably missed about my last school. The music Vibration at the school was very high, like. There was something that tied the building together. We had a very great music teacher. And so that was something that the whole school was on the same vibration, you know. Just to hear those kids sing, sing on the same tune, clap and dance together. Synchronization. It was a very high vibration and so. I love to have music apart of my space. A part of my everyday get down.

00:56:44

DM

How have your spiritual practice evolved from childhood to now? And I think we talked. We touched on that. If you want to briefly say anything more about it.

00:56:52

SJ Educate

Well, yeah, I think as a child didn't have any. Like I said as a child. My spiritual practice would probably entail just praying because I thought I was going to fucking die. Or I thought...

00:57:06

DM

Why did you think you're going die? Because my. Like I said, we went to church all the time. Right. And they have these things called revival. And for me? Revival was like one of the worst for the time. Because, like all they do is put up, just put so much fear in you like. N- you finna die because you're not saved, you're going to hell and you're gonna burn. Every day, all day. I'm like damn, I'm dead. And then in my dead body, I'm gonna fucking burn. And so yeah. I was just like we going. I would go home. I'm like, I'm scared as fuck. Telling God that I don't wanna die and burn in hell. Man its crazy. And so. Yeah, my spirit, that was my spiritual practice as a child. But I don't think I really got in tune or tried to get in touch with myself spiritually until probably like my mid 20s. And I think. Yeah, it just took that long. Just trying to. Walk away from this shit walk away from like anger.

00:58:18

DM

So how might your practices influence other areas of your life, which I know we've briefly, we did kind of talk about this, but how much your spiritual practices influence, like your teaching or your Wellness, or your activism or your modernity, right. How you mother, your, your students?

00:58:37

SJ Educate

It definitely affects it in a way. Seeing that daily affirmation of prayer in the car on the way to school, right. I'm trying to get myself in balance, right? I think I would say it is my intent today as it was yesterday as it will be tomorrow to be the best person I could be to be, to live to the highest of my potential to provide the best educational support. I can for these children. So it was that was like a daily prayer in my car on the way to school every day. You know. So trying to get into that mindset to be the best that I can be. And that helps because you know. It's a precursor to coming into contact with that student who is kind of difficult. It's a pretty, you know, it's kind of, it's like, OK, I done already had my pill today, so I'm not gonna react in the way that's not going to show you love or not going to be compassionate and compassion is something that I have to pray for every day as well. Because working with children. You come to the understanding of knowing that uh children operate out of emotion. Cause that's how they that's all they got. All they got is emotion. As adults, we have other things going on. You know what I'm saying? You might have two jobs and everything, you know, you might have different things, things and you can go do to make you happy because you're an adult. You can go. You know, relieve stress, things like that, but children. Most things they do are out of some type of emotion, whether that be fear, hunger or whatever. It is right? With that understanding, you know. You have to kind of be a person who is going to uh put your emotions to the side because you can just like them, operate out of emotions. I don't like that you cursing me and so I'm gonna curse you back, you know. So you know my spiritual practices, I think have allowed me to operate from a place of

compassion and love. And nurture and wanting to be the best that I could you know. For every child that I came in contact with. Just to always be my best. And to do what's right. Because like that's something we always tell the children. To do is do what is right because it's the right thing to do. And I think. When you are living like that, you know, people see the children do see, you know things kind of. Kind of show. And not that you're doing it for people to see, but I never. I'm say I've never, really had a lot of difficulty. We all have our trying days, we have our trying students, but things were kind of always. Able to, you know, pan out or able to level themselves out, you know. And I'm not saying I'm doing everything right, but you know. I think my spiritual practices, you know helped me to.

01:02:36

DM

If I wanted to join in with you, with your practices, what are some things I will have to learn or do?

01:02:39

SJ Educate

I don't think you have to learn to do nothing because like I said, I operate on how I feel. The feeling within me. So if I was giving you advice on to be like me or something of me, it would be to tap into how you feel. What you think you should do. You know? I'm saying, do you feel like praying right now? Do you feel like crying? Do you feel like you need to go take a walk in the park. That will be my starting point or my advice to you to tap into how you feel and think about what you need to do.

01:03:31

DM

Do you, have you gathered any of your practices from or like borrowed things from any sort of religion or whether be Christianity or Islam or African traditional religions?

01:03:45

SJ Educate

Oh well, yeah, of course. You know, creating the thing a lot of different religions, religions like, I don't know, common religions or practices like the Santeria. Vodun, they all do things like that. They all have like sacred spaces that they hold their ancestors to. Like with pictures, things that belong to them with the candle work and things like that, all those are borrowed practices. You know, I don't want to say that I haven't borrowed any of those practices, but like I say. How do I go about doing those things I just do you know what comes to me? I didn't read a book and be like, you know, I need to do XYZ with this candle, because you need to poof of Hoodoo said do that, you know. But I think. A lot of practices and religions borrow from each other, you know, and because a lot of these things innately feel right. Such as lighting a candle. Or lighting the candle and putting it by your picture, and sitting here and having a conversation with you, that's not something that is far fetched that somebody had to write down and put in a book. Like that feels innately right. That's a way for me to reach out to you touch you tap into your spirit. It's innately human to want to make sure that that you are. Are in a good space and whatever. Wherever you are wherever the next place you've transcended is naturally innate for me to want

to make sure that you have everything you need. So when we burn the money. When we burn these things for you. Or when we set out food for you that just feels that feels innate. So I don't think nobody had to necessarily tell us.

01:06:17

DM

You burn actual money.

01:06:19

SJ Educate

Some people burn actually money. I've never burned actual money, but I know that some people do. This money is called God's paper or something like that. If I'm saying that right Moss paper. And so it's not real money, but it's money that has, like, maybe deities on it or something like that. With a note that has 10 million however much money that you wanted to purchase on it, and now they have they do have actual Moss paper with American bills notes. On it so those are the ones that I use

01:08:10

DM

OK. And we're getting towards the end of this first interview. What have been your experiences in understanding your identity? Like when it when it comes to being Black. What have been your experiences in understanding your identity? For instance, when you hear the word black, what comes to mind?

01:07:38

SJ Educate

Well, when I hear the word black. I think about melanated people. When I hear the word black. I think. In reference to identity. That's kind of bit of up and down an up and down paradigm for probably mostly everybody like throughout your life because it changes some. Being as a young black person. Uh, I would say in my late teens, late teens early 20, like 20-21. Of course, knowing that I'm black, I've never wanted to really oh be around other cultures or like I never thought to myself I want to go to Europe and see how they do it in Europe or some shit like that? So I've never had the desire to be around other cultures or other people, right? But at the same time and that at that age. I was trying to figure out who I was. As a I guess. For lack of better words, black lesbian. With a child. That was. Weird, right? It sounds weird, but anyway. And I would say, you know, moving from that and all the way to now I'm 37 now. Now it seems like a little bit more simpler for me in my mind. In my understanding I'm a I'm a melanated person. I'm just. I'm just a melanated Black Woman. In this world. I don't necessarily feel that the other things that we have to identify ourselves matter. Which I know because I feel. Like it's just a group. Or we have to be grouped? I don't think we have to be grouped in some cases we do have to like you know, but because I'm married to a woman, I guess I have to be looked at as a lesbian. Because I'm a melanated person I'm African American or Black. Because I got a child, I'm a parent. Like I guess you have to have all these groups. Because I have a education certification. I might be considered middle class but it seem like we all in the same we all in the same damn pot. There's not too many things that make us different. You know, so those things

are not as far as identity, those things are not is not important to me. So me identifying as a a Black. Female. melanated being I would say that. That's how I identify.

01:11:31

DM

How did you first become aware of your blackness?

01:11:40

SJ Educate

As a child. I'm trying. I can't think of any very isolated event. UM. But I just think about my mom or think about. Yeah, being back at home and I can't remember exactly like an isolated event but it's. Just the talk or how they talk, how my mom talks. You know them white folks or, we got to do this. My mom? Because you know my mom. My mom was born in 56. So she told me about. You know, they had to go to the back of the store, you know, when they went to the store or, you know, seeing the different water fountains. They had different schools. They have different high schools. They had different everything. So, my mom experienced those things, but of course, that's how she talked about them very separately. But even as an adult now, I'm not trying to be a part of it. I'm not even really with full integration. So like. I get it.

Appendix E: Photovoice Activities

Deborah Davis Photovoice Activity 1



Figure 13. Appendix Deborah Davis Photovoice Activity 1

Pictures that you view with skin care products illustrate how this type of activity supported my mental health, in addition to financial health while teaching- D. Davis, April 3, 2023, email correspondence.

Deborah Davis Photovoice Activity 2



Figure 14. Appendix Deborah Davis Photovoice Activity 2

“Pictures with family, graduations, all stress how important we thought those unions were and which contributed to our well being.” – Deborah Davis, email correspondence, April 3, 2023

Tamara Ivy Photovoice Activity 1



Figure 15. Appendix Tamara Ivy Photovoice Activity 1

“Family is my heartbeat! I love being around my family. Pray, Love, Fellowship, Eating are just a few of the values that has been instilled in me. My family is a PRAYING Family. Praying is the core of our being.”- Tam Ivy, email correspondence, March 20, 2023

Tamara Ivy Photovoice Activity 2



Figure 16. Appendix Tamara Ivy Photovoice Activity 2

Reading books by spiritual authors such as Joyce Meyers, TD Jakes, and Sarah Jakes Roberts brings me much joy and takes me away from the stressors of the day. In the morning, I wake up and read my devotions because I want God to guide my thoughts, words, and actions throughout day. I also like to journal. Journaling allows me to really express myself as well as for reflection.

-Tam Ivy, email correspondence, March 20, 2023

SJ Educate Photovoice Activity 1



Figure 17. Appendix SJ Educate Photovoice Activity 1

SJ Photovoice Reflection 1 (emailed to bwtcodesatl@gmail.com)

“I wanted to revisit the conversation because I now feel like I left out some things that shaped who I am now as an educator. I briefly spoke about my experience leaving the first school where I was the teacher of record because of the actions of the leadership but I didn’t speak about how

my actions affected the other teachers in there. I was told that the way that I chose to advocate for myself gave other teachers confidence and courage to do the same for themselves. The profession itself has a unspoken Stockholm syndrome vibration attached to it. Because teachers converse amongst each other about how this unfair or the unrealistic expectations of the job especially pertaining to standardized testing. But many of never take the grievances to the head of the snake. But I did that. Only to met another link in the chain who didn't care and felt like my grievances held no merit.”

SJ Educate Photovoice Activity 2

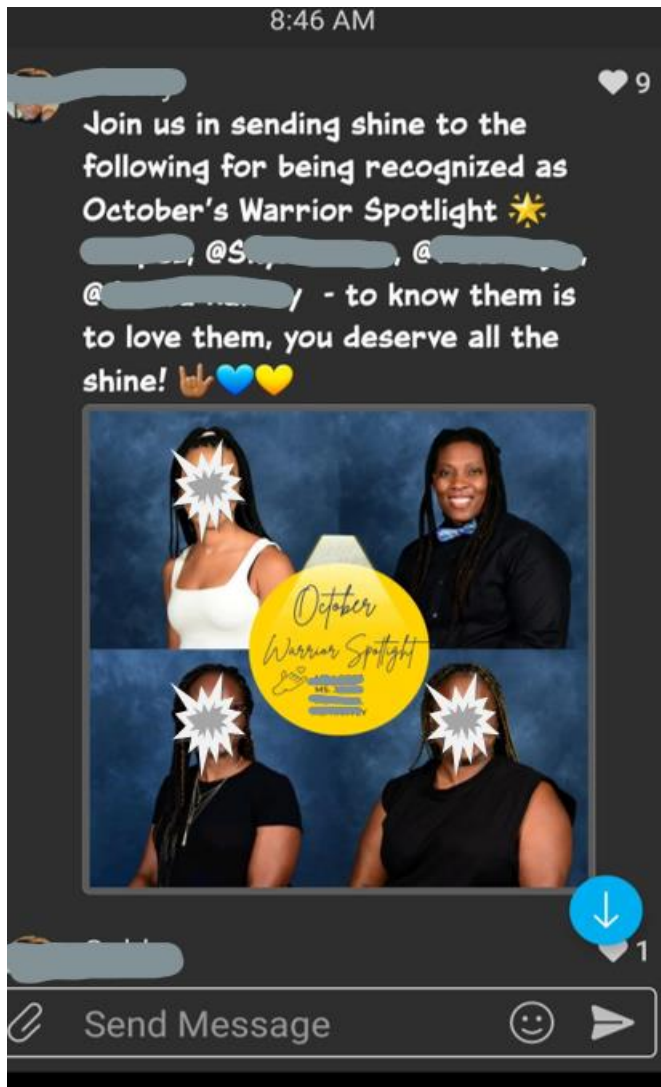


Figure 18. Appendix SJ Educate Photovoice Activity 2

“It’s unhealthy to feel inadequate and and unheard. It’s unhealthy to train your bladder to wait but teachers do it. You ask for bathroom break too much....

Kipp had teacher leaders....

And how do you process all this inadequacies? Cause you got your kids you got a husband

You got the surrogate kids in the class

Your side hustle

You got an observation coming up

Education is in the ground zero for unwellness.”

SJ Educate, Photovoice Reflection 2 emailed, April 2, 2023

SJ Educate Photovoice Activity 3



Figure 19. SJ Educate Photovoice Activity 3

“This is my altar, my spiritual space to be well and get well in all meanings of the word. You have to want to be well. You have to recognize when you are carrying someone else’s energy. Light that sage and call on the ancestors. Yell out devil get off me.” – Photovoice reflection, emailed April 2, 2023

Appendix F: Artifacts

Deborah Davis

II. Lesson Plan Format:

Preface --WHERE WERE MY PEOPLE AND WHAT WERE THEY DOING

WHEN.....? (THIS IS INCORPORATED IN EACH LESSON THUS MAKING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE STUDENT AND WHAT HE/SHE IS STUDYING

- MOTIVATION - how will I capture student interest

- OBJECTIVE- what we want to accomplish for this lesson

- LESSON PRESENTATION- steps to include Frontloading, Reinforcement, & Enrichment

- SQ3R (SURVEY, QUESTION, READ, RECITE, REVIEW) - Putting it all together

- APPLICATIONS (CW or HW) - Classroom or Homework assignments

- ASSESSMENT - Quizzes or Tests



Joy- D. Davis, Phone Conversation, April 06, 2023



Speaking with women about wellness and my products- D. Davis, April 6, 2023, phone conversation.

Tamara Ivy



Figure 20. Appendix Tam Ivy Teaching Artifact

Shaping young minds is my calling. I love to teach Social Studies (i.e. African American History, US History, etc.) and mentor young ladies. This speaks to me as being a learner for the rest of my life. We are never too old or young to learn from each other.- Tam Ivy, March 20, 2023, email correspondence



Figure 21. Appendix Tam Ivy and Joy

Hanging out with my co-workers is always a blast. It helps us to relieve the good and bad pressures and stressors of the week. Having a cocktail and a good meal with REAL Black Sisters who are encouraging and lift each other no matter what the circumstances are is a JOY!!-
Tam Ivy, March 20, 2023, email correspondence



Figure 22. Appendix SJ's Madea's Cup

My Madea's cup. Lineage is important.- SJ Educate, In person conversation, March 12, 2023.



Figure 23. Appendix SJ Entrepreneur

I started my business because I wanted to gain financial independence. I know I will never get that working at anybody's job. I created a conscious clothing brand to leave a legacy. Something for my daughter to have. -SJ, In person conversation March 12, 2023



Figure 24. Appendix SJ's Idea of Wellness

Me at the beach. Being in nature helps me stay well. -SJ Educate, in person conversation, March 12, 2023

Subjectivity

As a first-year teacher in Atlanta Public Schools, I was belittled, disrespected, and treated like data by my schools' principal. Though I was in the progress of receiving my master's in education at Georgia State, this Principal would often question my intelligence and accuse me of being too "Cinderella" like in the classroom, exclaiming the children were not here for fun, they needed someone mean and stern. As a product of a teacher preparation program that prides itself on culturally responsive pedagogy as a cornerstone of its curriculum, I was appalled to learn that the strategies I was learning at the university, which centered on the humanity of Black students, were to be disregarded for an authoritarian regime where students were always under the foot of a dictator instead of a nurturing teacher.

Over the course of my first year, I received countless need improvement observations when students would act out their traumas in the classroom during the subjective observations required to maintain a teaching license. Near the end of my stint with this school, I learned the principal was leaving for a new school, so she put very little investment into me as the only new teacher in the school building. Looking back, I can only laugh in thinking about the two doctor visits I made during this year because of the unexplained outbreaks of hives, hair loss, and insomnia I was experiencing at this time of my life which, upon reflection, disappeared after I stopped teaching in the summertime and never returned. My entire experience at this school taught me that I would have to prioritize my health and wellness if I wanted to be a teacher for the rest of my career.

I have taught in several Title I schools over the past seven years. At all of the schools I have worked, I saw predominantly Black and Latinx populations where most students received free or reduced lunch. While teaching in Dekalb, Atlanta, and Cobb County, I have noticed a persistent

trend across the years. Regardless of my placement, there is a lack of cultural awareness and little to no recognition of Black History Month. I recall the positive impact learning about my culture and history had on me as a child. It is distressing to know that students no longer have the same opportunity to experience education as I did as a child, acknowledging how it helped me feel worthy while seeing outside images that were constantly telling me my family and my race were less than because of our living conditions.

My teaching experiences have led me to believe that we are missing something, as teachers, schools, and communities, something that we must go back and fetch if we are to overcome systemic racism and create a land where we all live in peace and with our humanity intact. I am unsure if all BWT have had the opportunity to learn about their rich ancestral roots. Carter G. Woodson argues that Black Americans are subjected to an education that centers whiteness and only values Eurocentric trains of thought (1933). Woodson articulated this point nearly 100 years ago. However, it is possible that today's Black women teachers cannot impart empowering knowledge to their students because they do not have such knowledge or are not given the academic space to address self-affirming topics. Public schools' curriculum and performance standards fail to provide room for Black teachers to help recover their heritage or the heritages of Black students. I have experienced burnout in combatting the dominant narrative in the curriculum, which states the Black experience started with slavery, fighting with administration to recognize not only my agency in what I teach, but students' agencies in what they wish to learn, and overall, for the right of educational stakeholders to feel seen and whole. In teaching students of African descent and working with teachers of African descent, it is essential to understand how the African viewpoint on spirit once dominated how we as African people teach and learn in the world.