DREAMS OF HOME: (RE)IMAGINING SCHOOLING USING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS A BLACK EDUCATOR RESEARCHER MAMA

by

WHITNEY TOLEDO

(Under the Direction of Maureen Flint)

ABSTRACT

This autoethnographic study explores my experience as a Black woman, mother, researcher, and K-12 public school educator while considering the possibility of homeschooling my own children once they are of school age. Autoethnography provides an important entry point into the entangled questions of school choice, public school curriculum, and educational administration and policy discourse. Grounded in Black Feminist Epistemology, autoethnography makes possible an examination of how policies around homeschooling and race in education are enacted and experienced in practice from my specific subject positions. Using autoethnographic vignettes, this study provides a simultaneous individual and policy-level analysis of the decision-making process to potentially homeschool my children. Grappling with this decision and the related implications of this choice, I (re)imagine the possibilities of schooling and their intersections with Black motherhood.

INDEX WORDS: Black homeschooling, homeschooling, homeschool, educational policy, school choice, autoethnography, Black Feminist Epistemology, Black motherhood

DREAMS OF HOME: (RE)IMAGINING SCHOOLING USING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS A BLACK EDUCATOR RESEARCHER MAMA

by

WHITNEY TOLEDO

B.S.Ed. in Social Studies Education, University of Georgia, 2011

M.Ed. in Social Studies Education, University of Georgia, 2013

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2024

DREAMS OF HOME: (RE)IMAGINING SCHOOLING USING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS A BLACK EDUCATOR RESEARCHER MAMA

by

WHITNEY TOLEDO

Major Professor:	Maureen Flint
Committee:	Jamon Flowers
	Cheryl Fields-Smith

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
December 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am overwhelmed with gratitude for my family, friends, and professors. I could not have done this without you.

To my husband and best friend, Matt, I love you all the time. Thank you for sitting with me to keep me company while I wrote this, for being my soundboard to bounce my ideas and thoughts off of, and for your endless encouragement.

To my children, I cannot believe that you became the topic of my entire dissertation. When I entered the doctoral program, there is no way I could have ever dreamed that my work would one day center around you. You inspire me to be a better mom, educator, and researcher. My life is better because of you.

To my mom, thank you for always believing in me and pushing me to achieve better than I believed I was capable of at times. You were my first and favorite teacher. I love you!

To my in-laws, Bob and Margaret, I could not have done this without you. I am forever grateful for the amount of time and love you have poured into our children, providing me with the space to be a working mom and scholar. I love you!

To my professor, Dr. Flint, I am forever grateful to have gotten the opportunity to work with you. I have learned so much from you whether it was from working with you as your research assistant, being a student in your classes, or during our regular meetings (our pre-COVID meetings, drinking tea in your office were my favorite!). Thank you for being patient with me and speaking life over me.

To my committee, Dr. Fields-Smith and Dr. Flowers, thank you for your support and guidance. I am grateful for your time and for holding me to a high standard.

To my best friend and soul sister, Callie, you have encouraged me and believed in me to keep at it. You have been my side through all the highs and lows of life. I love you so much!

To the scholars turned doctors I met while in the program, Dr. Damaris Dunn and Dr. Kimberly Clarida, you became lifelong friends and aunties to my kids. You have walked beside me as I figured out how to wear these multiple hats (researcher, educator, mama). I love you both more than you will ever know!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

CHAPTER 1

MAPPING DREAMS

I have thought to myself so many times that if I ever had kids, I would homeschool them. I started thinking about this in 2017 I think, maybe a year earlier. I remember thinking to myself that the idea of being able to travel with my children and give them experiential learning opportunities they could never have in a classroom would be amazing. It has been six years since those initial thoughts about homeschooling, and much has happened in between – I quit teaching, I started a doctoral program and began my dissertation, research which focuses on Black homeschooling, and those hypothetical kids now exist. Two of them. Two minutes apart. In the three months since they have been born, I have thought multiple times to myself about if I would actually homeschool them. Theory into practice. The decision is not as simple as I thought it was. I have researched and read and intellectually, I have known it is not an easy decision. But looking at my daughters' faces really solidifies how difficult this decision is. I want to do right by them. At times, I feel like my reasons for wanting to do this are silly and privileged. On the other hand, my desires intersect with more serious concerns about white supremacy, racism, and colorism and how it manifests in public schooling. I have two girls who look so different from one another: one looks like my White husband with the exception that I think she might have strawberry blonde hair from peach fuzz she currently has growing in; the other looks like her Black and Hispanic mama. As a mom, I have become so attuned to how people treat my daughters. I want to shield and protect them. Writing this hurts.

Longing for Home

I feel like I am going through the motions of being an educator. I am overwhelmed. I feel stuck. I feel like I have traded my education to be (back) in education. Time has changed me so much. I know it sounds pie in the sky, but my energy no longer matches the energy of being in a traditional public school. I feel like an asshole for saying that. Like what an elitist-esque thing to say. But I don't mean it disrespectfully. I have returned back to the classroom after leaving for five years. The more I become reacclimated with being in this profession – within the walls of a traditional public school – the more I feel like you have to mentally be in a place where you are either a) committed no matter what because perhaps because you are intrinsically motivated within about the profession, or b) you are unaware and/or apathetic about the fact that you are being gaslit.

Five years ago, when I first started teaching, I had bought into the idea that the school systems sells us daily that if I just worked a little harder – figured out a different teaching strategy, pulled more small groups, or…lived, laughed, loved a little harder – our students would do better and be better. Now, back in the classroom after having left and attended graduate school for a doctoral degree in educational policy during that time, and having taken policy courses as part of my PhD program, I can no longer buy into that because I now know that students' academic success or well-being (which I am tying into behavior) is not for a lack of effort on teachers' parts. The teachers I work with work so damn hard – like *so* damn hard! My mentor, I don't know how she does it, but she is a badass. Period. She is single-handedly keeping our grade level department running like a well-oiled machine. She has a million balls in the air and somehow, still manages to make sure ours are still afloat as well. Despite this, it does not move the needle as much as advertised to teachers, with respect to increasing student test scores.

Most of the teachers I have worked with are just hanging on. One teacher told me she doesn't get paid enough to do this (accept student disrespect, students not doing their course work, etc.) and she wants to quit. She was so incredibly frustrated when she told me this, and in that conversation, she said she was going to take the day off the next day…and she did. And then she took the day off *after* that too. When she returned to work, she said that she had been sick, but to myself I wondered if she just needed some time away. I didn't want to pry, so I did not ask any questions. I know I wasn't the only one thinking about why she hadn't been there because one of our students asked where she was at, and if she wasn't at work because she was mad at them. *"No,"* I lied. Whatever her reason, she owes no one an explanation. She gets to disconnect and make space for herself mentally and emotionally, particularly within an education system that does not take into consideration how social policy has direct implications on education policy/outcomes that are outside of teachers' locus of control.

Today, I visited her class. She was visibly upset and frustrated with a group of students. She had asked a student to stop talking and they said they had not been talking. They had been talking. Another student was sitting there not doing any work. Seeking to help, I walked up to him and asked him what he was working on. He pulled out a sheet of folded paper from underneath his Chromebook and unfolded it.

"Why aren't you working on it?" I asked him.

He shrugged. *"I don't have my notes."*

"Where are your notes? I gave you another copy yesterday."

"I don't know," he responded.

The co-teacher overheard. It was silent when she asked him again where his notes were. He then said, *"I threw them away…"* A few students gasped, *"...when I was cleaning out my*

bookbag, and you said I could not get on my Chromebook [because he has repeatedly not been on task when using it], so…" he shrugged again.

I was annoyed. My co-teacher was annoyed. His responses had indicated that perhaps he believed that this was *her* fault that he did not have his notes and could not do the assignment. At least that was my perception of what this student was implying. Moments later, he silently mouthed something to another student as they smiled at each other. He was back to being off task and there seemed to have been no affect that he could not complete the assignment that 1) was a grade and 2) that his teacher was upset with him about. On an analytic level, I know that student behavior is driven by other things, but in that moment, where I was emotionally, the thought I had was that some teacher somewhere that teaches him was going to be told that if they would only change the instructional strategy or work harder to engage him, a scenario like this would not have arose. I also know intellectually, there is some truth to that. On reflection, that particular assignment *was* really boring. And really pointless. Students were learning disjointed, cherry-picked information about history that served to bolster the oppressor, that had no relevance to their lived experience. Add in learning it in the most archaic way, and it was the perfect storm.

I am having a relatively good experience compared to some of the other teachers. A teacher, not new to teaching, but new to the school, stopped by my room today. She vented that she was not having a good experience and was feeling unsupported. We are on the front lines of working with many young people who have trauma, and thus, navigating this cultural context of racism and polarization, which are largely outside of the context of what is within the realm of teachers' locus of control. And in the process, teachers are supposed to just figure out what to do on their own and simultaneously just do *a little more*. At the beginning of the school year,

students took a screening diagnostic that measured where they were at with reading and math. With respect to reading, out of the four classes I have – 99 students total – 73 of them are not reading at grade level. 74 percent of them. My cursor is blinking as I sit and stare at what I just wrote. I hadn't done the math before. So, it is difficult to not consider what factors influence this. One argument around this particular diagnostic is that students do not take it seriously so therefore, the results are skewed. This may very well be the case, but research indicates that across the U.S. there are many students reading below grade level. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress' (NAEP) national achievement level results,

> In 2022, thirty-one percent of eighth-grade students performed at or above the NAEP Proficient level on the reading assessment, which was 3 percentage points lower compared to 2019, the previous assessment year (para. 1).

This means that 69 percent of eighth-grade students in the U.S. are reading below grade level which is the vast majority. This instills fear in me as an educator and as a mother. The more I think about it, the stronger my feelings become around wanting to home educate my children.

Introduction

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, homeschooling received significant amounts of news and media attention as more and more parents chose to home educate (Hernholm, 2024). Assumptions that this trend would fizzle were put to rest as data from the 2022-2023 school year showed these homeschooling numbers had sustained themselves in the aftermath of the pandemic (Jamison et al., 2023). Zooming in on Black families in particular, this trend is even more widespread: between the period of May 2020 to October 2020, self-reported homeschooling by Black families increased by 12.8 percent, from 3.3 to 16.1 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021, para. 13). Additionally, this demographic is the fastest growing

homeschool group in terms of race (Cheng & Donnelly, 2019; Dennison et al., 2020; Fields-Smith, 2005; Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Fineman & Shepherd, 2016; Miles, 2021; Ray, 2015; Stewart, 2020).

My study explores my experience as a Black woman, mother, researcher, and K-12 public school educator who is considering the possibility of homeschooling my own children once they are of school age. Through a close examination of my own experience grappling with this decision and the related implications of this choice, I (re)imagine the possibilities of schooling and their intersections with Black motherhood. This inquiry is increasingly relevant in the present moment. As Adams (2023) shared, "More and more Black families have turned to home-schooling in the past six years, but 2020 saw a significant increase when the pandemic disrupted in-person education, sending children home to rely on virtual lessons" (para. 6). The U.S. Census Bureau's (2021) 'Household Pulse Survey' illustrates this claim noting that, "By fall [2020], 11.1% of households with school-age children reported homeschooling (Sept. 30-Oct. 12)" (para. 8). This is a notable increase: in 1999, only 1.7 percent of U.S. families home educated their children, or about 850,000 students, but by 2012, this had increased to 1.8 million students, an increase of 47 percent holding steady over the decade until 2020 (Eggleston & Fields, 2021; Redford et. al, 2017). This increase in homeschooling in the wake of the pandemic is also notable when aggregated by race, demonstrating new trends in *who* is being homeschooled. Specifically, the initial survey results from April 23, 2020 to May 5, 2020 showed 3.3 percent of Black students, 6.2 percent of Hispanic students, and 5.7 of white students were homeschooled (Eggleston & Fields, 2021). When the survey was conducted again 16 weeks later, the result revealed that homeschooling rates among these populations had increased: Black

families were at 16.1 percent, Hispanic families were at 12.1 percent, and White families were at 9.7 percent.

Increases in Black homeschooling following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic suggests an important area of study. While traditionally understood as a choice for conservative Christian, White families, research in the past decade has demonstrated that homeschooling can also be a practice of culturally responsive schooling or anti-racist schooling for families of color, a rejection and a response to the White supremacist foundations of public education in the United States (Ringstaff, 2023). The increase in homeschooling by Black families in particular following the onset of COVID-19 underscores the necessity of this study given the shifting and changing context of this form of school choice. In other words, the trend to choose to homeschool by Black families is not done in a vacuum. It is done in the context of a global pandemic which disproportionately affected people of color (Jason et. al, 2023), it is done in the context of increasing movements and protests for Black life (Ringstaff, 2023), it is done in the midst of increases in public school surveillance and violence against Black students (Jenkins & Warren, 2024), it is done as state legislatures pass laws and policies which limit open and frank discussions of racism and white supremacy in public schooling (Schwartz, 2021). Through examining the complexities and nuances of the choice to homeschool through the lens of my own subject positions as a Black woman, mother, and public school teacher, I hope to offer implications for the field of educational policy and homeschooling studies.

Homeschool as a form of school choice matters as it has policy implications. Stewart (2023) suggested that homeschooling as a form of school choice should be taken more seriously and not viewed as simply being a niche practice. As homeschooling becomes more prevalent, one must consider what this does to the existing local public schools that inevitably “lose”

students and thus the funding each child "brings" with them into that school in the form of per pupil dollars. Subsequently, the impact that this has on resource availability for students or the ability to attract and retain highly qualified teachers are also impacted. Kunzman (2012) shared that while the vast majority of the school-age population still attend traditional public schools, with the proliferation of alternative education models,

> ...the learning process for young people may bear little resemblance to institutional schooling of the twentieth century, and the practical distinctions between LaE [life as education] and schooling will blur for more and more families. What that means for the provision and oversight of those educational experiences merits serious philosophical and policy consideration (p. 77).

While this author considered schooling versus education, this work still underscores how decisions about home education have legal and policy implications more broadly.

Current Context

The state of Florida has been the subject of many headlines for its controversial educational laws and policies around teaching Black history that set the stage for Black parents' school choice. Examining some of Florida's specific educational laws and policies is important as they have had quite the national spotlight. Further, this could be an indication of how the stage is being set for other conservative-leaning/led states and their approach toward future educational policy, such as Georgia where I am located. Additionally, over the past several years, Florida has set the stage for oppressive legislation around Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and critical race theory. In the 2023 Florida's State Academic Standards for social studies, standard SS.912.AA.3.6 states that students should be able to, "Describe the emergence, growth, destruction and rebuilding of black communities during Reconstruction and beyond" (p. 17). A

benchmark clarification for this standard reads, “Instruction includes acts of violence perpetrated against and by African Americans but is not limited to 1906 Atlanta Race Riot, 1919 Washington, D.C. Race Riot, 1920 Ocoee Massacre, 1921 Tulsa Massacre and the 1923 Rosewood Massacre” (p. 17). The verbiage of “acts of violence perpetrated against *and by* African Americans” is harmful as there was significant harm done to Black people particularly during the Reconstruction era. It is intellectually dishonest to teach American history from this vantage point as it omits the power dynamic that was at play between Black and White people following the Civil War. Additionally, it neutralizes the atrocities committed against Black people and communities by “both sides-ing” it. In other words, this curriculum sets up a false (and violent) equivalency: White people did bad things, but so did Black people.

The “Stop WOKE Act” backed by Florida’s governor, Ron DeSantis, was the first of its kind that would provide people and businesses with the tools necessary to “stand up against discrimination and woke indoctrination” (Ron DeSantis Staff, 2022, para. 1). It was passed in April 2022 and went into effect July 1, 2022. In other words, this legislation, endorsed by Florida’s governor, would be novel in that it would prevent discrimination and indoctrination be it in the workplace or at school and would equip children and their families on how to combat such.

In response to this law, Interim Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Florida, Amy Turkel stated,

> “This dangerous law is part of a nationwide trend to whitewash history and chill free speech in classrooms and workplaces. It will infringe on teachers’ and employers’ First Amendment rights and chill their ability to use concepts like systemic racism and gender discrimination to teach about and discuss important American history. It prevents

> students from exercising their right to learn about the history and lived experiences of Black people and other marginalized people in our country. It tells Black and Brown communities that their histories and stories don't matter" (ACLU of Florida, 2022, para. 4).

Turkel's response pushed back on Governor Ron DeSantis' "Stop WOKE Act" and asserted that this piece of legislation does not promote individual freedoms and rights as it aims at sugarcoating and/or silencing the lived experiences of those who have been marginalized throughout history.

Atterbury (2023) wrote,

> "The state tweaked its history curriculum to match the so-called Stop WOKE law that takes aim at lessons over issues like 'white privilege' by creating new protections for students and workers, including that a person should not be instructed to "feel guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress" due to their race, color, sex or national origin" (para. 5).

Thus, the state's history curriculum changing to match this law seeks to protect White privilege through stifling the evocation of history empathy.

Legislation such as that enacted in Florida is important to consider because these anti-Black policies reproduce racist and discriminatory practices that are harmful to Black children in public schooling. Williams-Johnson and Fields-Smith (2022) explained that, "one factor that remains unique to Black homeschool families is the need to overcome anti-Black racism experienced within and outside of conventional schools" (Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013, 255). Policies such as these underscore that it is a myth that anti-Black racist educational policies and

practices went away after the *Brown v. Board (1954)* ruling. The idea that the Lost Cause was something only seen after the Civil War (i.e. located in a time since past) is also not true.

The rewriting and/or White-washing of history in schools is another way to silence Black and Brown people. Majoritarian narratives are harmful and oppressive to historically marginalized groups. This matters as it can motivate Black families to homeschool their children from racism in society and in school (Ringstaff, 2023). Additionally, it should be underscored that there have not been any significant new civil rights or urban policies since the 1970s, namely school desegregation and voting rights, both of which have had tremendous implications on the U.S. societal and educational landscapes (Mordechay & Orfield, 2017). As such, there is not any current legislation/policy to address the racial tensions being experienced and no real, tangible way to prepare future generations of students who will attend traditional public schools (Mordechay & Orfield, 2017).

The ongoing climate of prioritizing majoritarian narratives in public schooling spaces (i.e. through laws like Florida's "Stop WOKE Act") is particularly problematic as traditional public schools have rapidly shifted in their demographics. Frankenberg (2012) explained that nearly 20 percent, or one in five, suburban districts are experiencing "rapid racial change" (p. 30). To illustrate this, the school I work at – a large suburban school district in the southeastern part of the U.S – had an enrollment of roughly 1,500 White students, 380 Black students, and 370 Hispanic students in 2009. In 2022, these racial demographics had changed to reflect an enrollment of roughly 500 White students (67 percent decrease), 300 Black students (21 percent decrease), and 400 Hispanic students (8 percent increase) (Urban Institute, 2024). Furthermore, schools and communities across the U.S. are not only more diverse, but also more unequal than ever before (Chemerinsky, 2005; Frankenberg, 2012; Orfield, 2005; Rothstein, 2017; Turner,

2015). Mordechay and Orfield (2017) wrote, “As the demographic transition intensifies, more of the nation’s minority students are likely to attend intensely segregated and impoverished schools” (p. 198).

Research from Turner (2020) revealed that administrators and school board members are tasked with leading public schools when faced with racially and economically stratified student populations, and are often unequipped to lead such change. When responding to changing demographics and racial stratification, educational leaders tend to adopt “new managerial” policies and practices, which are characterized by a distinct entrepreneurial approach where schools are treated as businesses (Turner, 2020). These decisions are often reflective of wealthier, oftentimes White populations which in turn mirror this privileged constituencies’ ideologies and beliefs (Rothstein, 2017; Turner, 2020). The trend in educational administration toward entrepreneurial strategies is fundamentally flawed because it does not address inequity being experienced by the school or its students; additionally, these types of practices have provided leaders with a guise by which they appear on the surface to be addressing issues of access and equity while in reality, these practices are contradictory at best and reproducing “race and class domination” at worst (Turner, 2020, p. 11).

Context of Study

The use of autoethnography to explore my experiences as a Black woman, K-12 teacher, and mother of young children provides an important entry point into the entangled questions of school choice, public school curriculum, and educational administration and policy discourse. Autoethnography allows me to examine what the scholarly literature says is happening relative to my lived experiences as a Black woman, educator, and a mother within the context of this phenomena. Likewise, autoethnography makes possible an examination of how policies around

homeschooling and race in education are enacted and experienced in practice from my specific subject positions. My research adds to extant literature on Black (mothers) homeschooling through providing a simultaneous individual and policy-level analysis of the decision-making process I undergo to potentially homeschool my own children through autoethnographic vignettes which are grounded in policy and literature.

In addition to contributing to the extant literature on Black homeschooling, I use my research and experiences to (re)image education and make policy recommendations for K-12 schools. Williams-Johnson and Fields-Smith (2022) wrote,

> there exists a consistent pattern within research literature that suggests Black parents who homeschool are restricted by current schooling options and are frustrated with schooling practices (p. 255).

It is important to highlight that many Black parents who choose to homeschool their children are not against traditional K-12 education, but rather protecting their children from the harm these institutions inflict upon them (Williams-Johnson & Fields-Smith, 2022).

This study uses autoethnographic writing as a creative response to the world around me (Bacon, 2019). Incorporating autoethnographic vignettes as I did in the introduction of my dissertation is both the data and my method of analysis. This study aims to stitch together the various facets of my own lived experiences and how these impact the decision-making process to homeschool my own children – an act of resistance and expression of agency – as a Black woman, mother, educator, and scholar.

The process of (re)imagining this space for teaching and learning means examining the world around me, breaking down barriers I have built up to protect myself, and allowing myself to feel my feelings when the protective walls are no longer up (Toliver, 2019). Writing down the

hard parts, the messy parts, feels like it makes these things true and real. Not that they were not before, but when they are down on paper, the words feel alive in a way that they were not before. Also, it feels like an act of resistance. Which is scary. Sometimes it seems that in order to be a "good" teacher, you dare not speak out against the institution. Because "good" teachers do whatever necessary to protect the institution, and oftentimes, I think that may mean being quiet. But being quiet in an effort to be "good" inevitably causes existing problems and problematic policies to replicate themselves. So, this dissertation is also a practice of me, learning to speak my voice and my truth as a Black educator, scholar and mother.

Subjectivity Statement

Interest in this research topic stems from my personal and professional identities as a Black woman, mother, scholar, and public school educator. I did not always have aspirations of becoming a K-12 teacher. In fact, I chose education, more specifically social studies education, because I did not think I was capable of doing anything else. Childhood education and English education majors – of particular interest to me – were at the time known for being incredibly competitive, so I disqualified myself before anyone else could. This is my story. Of course, I knew I wanted to help young people and make a difference in the world, but there is no grandiose or sexy story about the inception of my teaching journey, a marked difference in the teaching journey stories of many fellow educators I have had the privilege of talking to and working with. This is and has been, however, an important piece of my story.

Working in a traditional K-12 public school setting as a classroom teacher has taught me a lot about myself. Entering the classroom, I encountered students sitting in front of me who also felt too small, too insignificant to set the bar higher for themselves. Their backgrounds and experiences have varied from mine in many ways, but over the years, I have found myself

becoming more attuned to the ways in which the educational system contributed to these feelings of low self-confidence and low self-efficacy in the realm of academics. As Dillard (2021) shared,

> Current conversations about racial and intersectional identities are largely silent about the role of spirituality, spiritual health and well-being in the lives of Black teachers who are often, by default, also those teachers called both to teach and provide a safe haven from the detrimental impact of race, gender, and inequities in education for Black and Brown students…This is part of the invisible labor and burden that Black women teachers bear everyday (pp. 2-3).

As a K-12 teacher, the students I was always closest to were those who usually sought to build a relationship with me. It was not intentional, but by way of how conversational they were and/or the time I spent with them as they would volunteer to help with things around the classroom. It did not happen in some calculated way, but rather organically because now I had the time and the energy, and I wanted to know more and do more and be more involved. My positionality as a Black woman, mother, scholar, and educator is the lens through which I see the world and am navigating this educational journey as I make the decision to possibly homeschool my own children in the future.

As a teacher, I began to dig into the social studies content in an attempt to make my lessons more meaningful and relevant to students, and in the process, I fell in love with history. I was broken by it at the same time. The tangible expression of the invisible burden Black women teachers experience in an effort to create a safe learning environment. The marginalized voices silenced by the dominant group in society I would come to realize was my own voice. They were my students' voices. The tracking of students came into focus. I saw the cracks in the education

system I had not seen as a younger woman and novice teacher. I thought, *Would I send my own children to a traditional school one day?*

This led me to leaving the classroom and working on my doctoral degree in educational policy. Working on my PhD would be the first time in my academic career I felt confident in "doing school," so to speak. I learned how to advocate for myself. I was less timid and learned how to build relationships with my professors, something I would have been too afraid to do as a K-12, undergraduate, or initial graduate student obtaining my master's degree. In my PhD courses, we openly discussed issues of race and gender and how public policy impacts school policy. I began to understand how the system had been stacked against me as a Black student, Black woman, and Black teacher. I don't remember the exact moment I had this realization, just an overall feeling of *Oh, this is different than before. This is how this looks.* My circumstances were different though too. I had time now to attend office hours. I had a quiet space at home dedicated to school work. I was not working, I was not married, and I did not have kids at the time, so I was able to just focus on school. I could lean all the way in and I did. And I took what I had learned as a teacher and flipped it now that I was the student.

COVID-19 shifted things for me, personally and professionally. I was spending less physical time at school and more time at home. I would end up meeting my now spouse and forming a bond over our political beliefs. Two years later, we welcomed our twin girls. This meant double the diapers and formula, and also a new sense of feeling an immense amount of responsibility for other people. As such, I found myself making my way back to the classroom as I wanted to make sure I could provide not only the necessities for my kids, but also opportunities and experiences. Returning to the classroom, I found myself returning to thoughts around what homeschooling my own children might look like and how my lived experiences as a K-12 public

school educator, researcher, and mother. I began to consider how my own identities influenced my decision-making as well as the policy implications of home educating.

Research Questions

Building from this foundation, the research questions my study seeks to explore are:

- How does the experience of researching the topic of Black women choosing to homeschool their children influence my own decision-making to homeschool my own children?
    - How do my various identities (mother, educator, Black woman) matter in this decision?
    - In what ways does policy entangle with this decision?

Through exploring these questions, I offer a (re)imagining of the schooling experience through (Black) (woman) homeschooling.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Homeschooling Policy Literature

Ray (2013) described homeschooling as "a form of private education that is parent led and home based" (p. 324). This definition has been critiqued as being outdated as it does not encompass the full range of how parents actually *do* homeschool. Williams-Johnson and Fields-Smith (2022) explained, "Today, parents homeschool in a variety of ways including co-ops, learning pods, outsourcing, online homeschool programs, and hiring tutors or certified teachers (Anderson, 2018)" (p. 254). Still, regardless of how parents implemented the practice of homeschooling, this particular form of schooling gives parents an increased amount of control over the education their children receive (Williams-Johnson & Fields-Smith, 2022). In this dissertation, I define homeschooling as a form of schooling that bridges traditional conceptualizations homeschool (e.g. children being taught in their home by a live in guardian or parent) with more contemporary realities of homeschooling (i.e. partnerships with local schools, co-ops, pods, online learning, tutors etc.). I ground my research in this definition as it is one that allows for the full range of definitions that Black families negotiate with their children. Additionally, an expansive definition of homeschooling opens up possibilities for (re)imagining homeschooling sites and spaces as acts of agency and resistance through the ways Black families in particular forge educational experiences for their children (Williams-Johnson & Fields-Smith, 2022). Referencing Anderson's (2018) work, Williams-Johnson and Fields-Smith (2022) shared, "Today, parents homeschool in a variety of ways including co-ops, learning pods, outsourcing, online homeschool programs, and hiring tutors or certified teachers" (p. 254).

Historically, homeschooling as a mode of education was the norm until the 19th century. However, at the turn of the century, the vast majority of U.S. students were no longer being homeschooled as educational policies requiring student attendance in public schools and direct state control became more prominent (Dwyer & Peters, 2019; Ray, 2013). Alexander and Alexander (2005) shared, "The traditions of the United States clearly enunciate the desire and necessity for maintaining a republican form of government. To this end, universal public education is required" (p. 21). This was especially heighted as the American landscape became more diverse due to immigration and industrialization, so too grew the threat to the dominant culture's cultural and social order (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). Thus, public schools were seen as being a means by which social order could be controlled via having children assimilate (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). Public education was broadly accepted in the early 19th century until public opinion about compulsory schooling began to shift following *Brown v. Board of Education*. This 1954 court ruling legally called for the end of desegregation in public schools, and eventually, integration of schools in addition to other public spaces (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). This would result in the resurgence of homeschool, a choice for White families to opt out of school integration (Stewart, 2023). Prior to *Brown v. Board of Education*, "Only 10,000 to 15,000 children were being homeschooled in the 1970s" (Ray, 2013).

As schools continued to integrate, by the 1970s, homeschooling had grown to 2.5 million K-12 students in the U.S., and since, has continued to increase to 4 million by early 2021 (Ray et al., 2021). As seen in figure 1, results of the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey revealed, "By fall [2020], 11.1% of households with school-age children reported homeschooling (Sept. 30-Oct. 12)" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021, para. 8). Additionally, the survey included a clarification to distinguish between homeschooling and virtual learning in an effort to ensure that

families were reporting accurately. In other words, homeschooling rates in the U.S. have nearly tripled since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. While homeschooling has become an increasingly popular form of school choice, the research available in this field is still scarce (Bhatt, 2014; Dahlquist et al., 2006; Ray et. al, 2021).

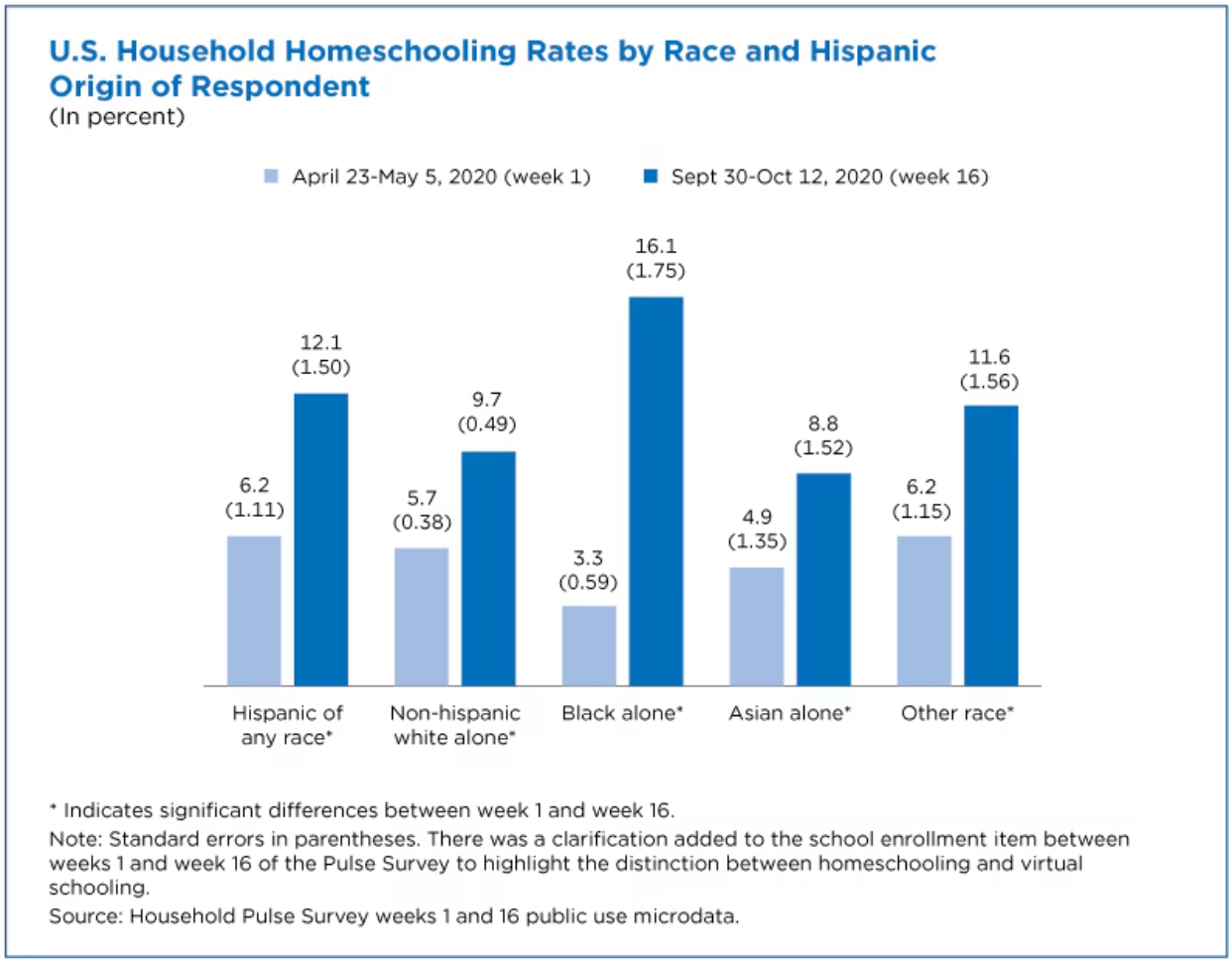

Figure 1, U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey Results

Historical Overview

Drawing from Erickson (2005), Cooper and Sureau (2007) asserted that because compulsory education laws established in the early 1900s made it illegal to educate children at home instead of attending traditional school, homeschooling was developed as an explicit response to the notion of public education. Into the late 1970s, homeschooling, known then as

criminal truancy, was illegal in almost all states (Somerville, 2001). Somerville noted that families would often go to extreme measures to keep their children out of public school, including families hiding out from authorities, moving their children to various districts as a means of not being exposed, and even parents receiving jail time. These legal restrictions and consequences meant that less than 20,000 students were homeschooled prior to the 1970s (Brown, 2021).

In the Supreme Court case, *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972), members of the Old Order Amish religion argued that compulsory education, particularly education required after eighth grade, violated their Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment by inhibiting their religious upbringing. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Amish and agreed that Wisconsin law did in fact interfere with their religious freedom. In their opinion, Chief Justice Warren Burger stated,

> "The impact of the compulsory-attendance law on respondents' practice of the Amish religion is not only severe, but inescapable, for the Wisconsin law affirmatively compels them, under threat of criminal sanction, to perform acts undeniably at odds with . . . their religious beliefs" (National Constitution Center, para. 13).

This ruling was indelible to the homeschool community. Although this ruling particularly focused on freedom of religion, it was a landmark case in that it conveyed that the state could not infringe upon guaranteed rights and freedoms, and that these freedoms extended to the freedom to choose how children were educated. Also, this ruling gave parents the power to protect their children from unwanted beliefs, positions, or teachings via not requiring their attendance within the traditional school setting. This was important because it allowed parents to create a barrier or buffer of protection for their children from 'mainstream,' or secular, beliefs. Through

homeschooling, children were shielded from what they would otherwise have been exposed to via the curriculum or other students with different beliefs from their own.

Following the Yoder ruling, homeschooling rates steeply increased. However, although some have pointed to a "biblical rationale" (e.g. parents such as those in the Yoder case choosing to homeschool their children to protect them from mainstream beliefs) Murphy (2014) offers a different narrative. Instead, Murphy (2014) argued that homeschooling has become more popular because of how economic, social, and political ideas shape government action, and that these continue to change and evolve. In other words, education is an economic good, one that offers a competitive edge and opportunities. Thus, the increasing popularity of homeschooling following the Yoder ruling is more expansive than a desire to protect children from beliefs, rather, the choice to homeschool frames schooling as a solution and response to social changes.

The current American educational landscape is one in which homeschooling is a legal form of school choice. Thirty-four states and the District of Columbia recognize homeschooling via statutes or regulations, and 16 additional states recognize homeschooling under particular or general statutes for religious/private home education (Cooper & Sureau, 2007). However, despite its ubiquity, since the *Yoder* ruling, many debates have persisted around homeschooling and its policies and regulations. Some of these include: the amount of oversight a state should or should not have over homeschooling; how adequately prepared homeschoolers are for fulfilling the duties and responsibilities of a democratic citizen; and the academic achievement outcomes of students who are homeschooled relative to that of their peers who attend traditional schools (Cheng & Donnelly, 2019; Dahlquist et al., 2006). These arguments also include whether or not, and/or to what extent, school choice options can be considered a public good relative that of an

individual benefit (Dahlquist et al., 2006). In what follows I detail some of these policy considerations in relation to homeschooling.

Parental Rights/Autonomy

In response to the sharp increase in the percentage of homeschooled students between 2019 and 2021, Balingit and Rabinowitz (2021) of The Washington Post posited,

In many cases, the migration from mainstream education shows the rising fears among parents of color that schools are failing their children, and the growing awareness of racial disparities in the treatment and outcomes for children of color. Inequality is still deeply embedded in the nation's public schools, with yawning achievement gaps marking the performance between White and Asian students and Black and Latino ones. For parents already frustrated with their child's education, the pandemic provided another reason to give homeschooling a try (para. 13).

The rights and responsibilities of parents as they relate to school choice have played a role in creating educational policy. Arguments made by some parents have centered on their concerns about the environment of traditional forms of schooling, citing that it would leave their children exposed to drugs and/or alcohol, secular forms of instruction, and the potential of having to integrate schools (Cooper & Sureau, 2007; Dahlquist et al., 2006). Debates about the regulation of homeschooling directly impact this group of parents' autonomy as it is incongruent with core tenets of homeschooling that rests on "both parental rights and the sanctity of the home" (Fineman & Shepherd, 2016, p. 65).

Referencing Berends (2015) and Patillo (2015), Stewart (2020) shared,

"Race is embedded in the policy and rhetoric around school choice, which emphasize empowering parents to shop around the educational marketplace for the schooling options that provide the 'best fit' for the unique needs of students and families" (p. 254). This is important as

empowering Black families with this form of school choice is in itself an act of resistance (Cooper, 2007). In the following section I examine this further as I explore how homeschooling takes shape in practice.

Homeschooling in Practice

Variations in "Homeschooling"

Cooper and Sureau (2007) explained that homeschooling has "developed from a small, isolated, parent-led effort to a vibrant national movement to lobby for and legalize K-12 education at home in all 50 states," in which homeschooling families have developed organizations locally and nationally to help supplement their children's learning and enrichment (p. 110). While the homeschooling population is still composed of predominantly White families citing religious reasons for this schooling preference, contemporary data shows that the dominant narrative explaining this choice has changed (Cooper & Sureau, 2007; Fineman & Shepherd, 2016; Lubienski et al., 2013).

The decision to homeschool is multifaceted and is impacted by a variety of factors. As Dennison and colleagues (2020) noted, parents "exist in specific social, economic, political, and cultural contexts," and as such, they "make decisions with respect to the input from those in their immediate spheres of influence, including friends, family, colleagues, employers, role models, church and community leaders, and cultural icons" (p. 22). In 2016, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) shared that when asked about the most significant reason for choosing this particular schooling preference, 34 percent of homeschooling parents revealed that this centered around "a concern about school environment, such as safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure" (para. 5). The next two predominant reasons included dissatisfaction with their child's traditional school's academic instruction (17 percent); and parent's emphasis on the

importance of providing religious instruction (16 percent) (NCES, 2016, para. 5). Kunzman (2012) maintained that for homeschooling families, be it culture, practice, or ideology, and despite where you fall on the political spectrum, a commonality this group maintains "is the conviction that parents should be able to shape the education of their children, and the government should have little to no say about it" (p. 76). As Mazama and Lundy (2012) argue, "One of the critical aspects of homeschooling as a conscious and active exercise of agency is the creation of a liberated and protected space" (p. 740). Thus, other reasons given to homeschool include parents choosing to homeschool on the basis of race, as seen with the Black homeschool population, the fastest growing homeschool group (Cheng & Donnelly, 2019; Dennison et al., 2020; Fields-Smith, 2005; Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Fineman & Shepherd, 2016; Miles, 2021; Ray, 2015; Stewart, 2020), or for reasons due to their children having special needs (Cheng & Donnelly, 2019; Dennison et al., 2020; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009). The significance of the partnership between home and school has been a prominent feature amongst Black families, in both historical and contemporary contexts (Fields-Smith, 2005).

Notably, homeschooling families tend to have parents who have post-secondary education/training and who are not likely to be low-income (Brown, 2021; Dahlquist et al., 2006; Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013). In other words, it is important to note that the majority of homeschooling families in the U.S. trend toward being well-educated and middle-class (Brown, 2021), likely due to having the financial capacity to bear the costs, time, and resources necessary for this particular form of school choice (Stewart, 2023). Nonetheless, research shows that marginalized and/or low SES families may decide to move forward with homeschooling despite the financial hardship it may create (Dennison et al., 2020).

Opponents

On the other hand, those in opposition of homeschool have shared concerns that include: a lack of socialization; minimal exposure to diverse opinions and perspectives; and the inability for a well-rounded education provided at home (Dahlquist et al., 2006). With respect to the issue of socialization, one could push back on this as research has shown that the social and emotional learning skills of children who have been homeschooled are not only comparable to that of the public school peers, but they may even be more well adjusted (Dahlquist et al., 2006; Green-Hennessy, 2014). The literature further demonstrates that homeschooling parents are actually quite invested in their children's socialization, thus, were intentional about providing opportunities for their children that fostered social opportunities (Guterman & Neuman, 2017; Haugh, 2014; Medlin, 2013).

Critics have underscored that homeschooling perpetuates harm to students because the state relinquishes its responsibility to protect and educate children (Fineman & Shepherd, 2016). An example of harm provided by Fineman and Shepherd (2016) relies on research which argued that adults who had formerly been homeschooled "typically married younger, divorced more frequently, reported lower SAT scores, attended less selective colleges, and reported more feelings of helplessness and less direction for their lives" (p. 84). It is important to note that Fineman and Shepherd's (2016) research was grounded in vulnerability theory which asserts that from this perspective, "homeschooling should be understood to be a failure of the state to be fully responsive to the need of vulnerable subject in childhood for a strong educational foundation" (p. 63). Thus, from this lens, homeschooling is viewed from a deficit lens as being harmful and as a response to not providing access to an effective education (Fineman & Shepherd, 2016).

Other critiques of the homeschooling movement have argued that homeschooling challenges, or even further, rejects, the traditional public education system in the U.S., thus undermining our democratic society (Cooper & Sureau, 2007; Fineman & Shepherd, 2016). For example, one argument centers on cocooning, a concept used to describe children who "risk growing up without knowing and experiencing the variety of human abilities, values, beliefs, and cultures" (Dahlquist et al., 2006, p. 356). These scholars argued that students need exposure to the diversity experienced in public school education as this is necessary for them to participate in the economy as workers, citing that some of the curriculum/materials used by parents can serve as a major component in the spread of misinformation and in perpetuating falsehoods. This, Fineman and Shepherd (2016) contended, classifies as educational abuse.

One staunch opponent of homeschooling, Bartholet (2020), wrote that homeschooling gives parents far too much power and ultimately, is inconsistent with the human rights entitled to children. This author explained that because of the undue amount of power homeschooling provides parents, this allows them to subject their children to abuse and/or to neglect them whereas the traditional school setting would protect children from such (i.e. teachers and other school personnel acting as mandatory reporters to child protection services [CPS], or truancy laws if children are not in regular attendance of school). Bartholet (2020) also shared that consequently, children who are homeschooled are at a disadvantage as they miss learning crucial academic skills that eventually allows them to become employed. The author also noted that this then poses a democratic risk as students are not taught some of the cultural values and skills necessary to be civically engaged members of society. Moreover, the author emphasized the urgency of these problems as children are already a group without power who are often marginalized in society.

What Bartholet's (2020) argument does not take into consideration are the abuses being inflicted upon students within the school system, both oververt and covert. Drawing on Patricia William's work, Love (2013) described these abuses (i.e. discipline disproportionality, underqualified teachers) as a form of spirit-murdering, explaining that racism does not only exist in the context of inflicting physical pain, but also "robs dark people of their humanity and dignity and leaves personal, psychological, and spiritual injuries" (p. 38). The educational system in the U.S. mirrors our racially, socially, and economically stratified society that has marginalized and continues to marginalize Black and Brown people/communities. So, although Bartholet (2020) sees the school as a site of safety for students, where they are protected from home environments that perpetuate abuse and/or neglect, we must also acknowledge that traditional school environments are, for many children, far more dangerous. For example, examining discipline data reveals that disproportionate rates of Black students receive disciplinary action (Welsh & Little, 2018; Welsh, 2023). The stigma of these consequences can, and often do, follow students as the discipline can have a negative impact on future behavior (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009). More specifically, research has demonstrated that students who are suspended are more likely to interact with the judicial system and be incarcerated, what is known as the "school-to-prison pipeline" (Garrett et. al, 2024). The school-to-prison pipeline can additionally have serious repercussions on adult life outcomes, which too, impacts the ability for one to become a civically engaged member of society.

In this section, I have examined the landscape of homeschooling broadly through an overview of the historical context of homeschooling and related policy, factors that contribute to parents choosing to homeschool, and advocates and opponents arguments of homeschooling. In

the following section I zoom in to specifically examine the practice of homeschooling by Black parents.

Black Parental Preference for Homeschooling

Black Homeschooling

As documented in the previous section, the preference to homeschool may include a variety of reasons and can also be subject to change over time. Scholars who explore Black families' decision to homeschool emphasize how these factors shift in relation to a consideration of race and how race matters in families homeschooling experience (Fields-Smith, 2020; Lubienski et al., 2013; Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Ray, 2015). Having said this, however, it is important to note that the body of Black homeschool literature and the motivation(s) for homeschooling is nominal (Dennison et al., 2020; Fields-Smith, 2020; Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Ray, 2015; Stewart, 2020). Additionally, motivations for homeschooling mentioned in the previous section, while broad and encompassing, may still not capture historically underrepresented and/or marginalized groups of people (Mazama & Lundy, 2012). Studying these motivations continues to hold merit as the homeschool population continues to increase in diversity.

In the previous section, I mapped the landscape of homeschooling including policies and research on the field more broadly. In this section, I delve more deeply into research which specifically examines the experiences and motivations of Black parents' decision to homeschool. Historically, Black parents have had a vested interest in ensuring their children's academic achievement in an effort to stifle intergenerational disadvantage (Fields-Smith, 2005/2020). Fields-Smith (2005/2020) asserted that Black parents' involvement in their children's education has been well documented within historical research, emphasizing the risks Black families have

assumed. The violence inflicted upon Black bodies and psyches, dating back to the integration of schools following *Brown v. Board*, or earlier with the risks enslaved people took in order to learn how to read (Fields-Smith, 2005; Gaither, 2009), underscores the reverence and value Black families have placed on education. It is precisely this historical context – one that has been pushed to the margins in place of one that decenters Black families' deference for, and involvement in, their children's education – that is understudied, yet critically important to understanding the increasing number of contemporary Black families' preference to homeschool their children (Fields-Smith, 2020).

Black families and communities have had long lasting ties with one another to simultaneously foster success for their children while also trying to protect them from racism and discrimination. A study by Fields-Smith (2005/2020) illustrates this. In this research, she gathered qualitative data from 19 African American parents across five schools in one southeastern school district. The narratives of these parents revealed the continued esteem Black parents have for their children's education. The participants in the study also shared the ways in which they exercised their collectivism with each other to build communities to support their children. However, the families who participated had variations in the levels of trust they held for teachers and school leaders. Many of the parents cited the labor of needing to advocate for their children (and the children of other people), or the need to spend time at home improving the lesson their children received at school, amongst other concerns (Fields-Smith, 2020). Fields-Smith's findings underscored Black parents' attunement and involvement in their children's education and how this informs efforts to provide their children with a quality education, along with how and why homeschooling has become a popular alternative. In addition, Fields-Smith's (2005) study emphasized both the continued consideration and concern regarding education from

Black parents, as well as the continued lack of affirmative and anti-deficit research on Black parental involvement ineducation.

Motivations

Black parents' decisions to homeschool their children to avoid their children experiencing mental pain and distress from entrenched racism and white supremacy in the public school system means that the consideration of privacy is essential when considering home education as a form of school choice. Peters (2019), building on to Warren and Brandeis' (1890) work, explained, "Today, Black parents are… provid[ing]e a privacy boundary to preserve their children's past, present, and future selves who they envision will be unanchored by direct racial discrimination, at least in childhood" (p. 31). A value or right to privacy is baked into the foundation of the United States. Warren and Brandeis (1890) wrote, "The individual shall have full protection in person and in property is a principle as old as the common law; but it has been found necessary from time to time to define anew the exact nature and extent of such protection" (p. 193). In other words, Black parents are drawing on a long history of the right to privacy within the United States as they protect their children from learning about themselves and who they are *while* experiencing racial discrimination. Subsequently, when children experience harms associated with racial discrimination in a school environment (i.e. messages about being inferior, experiencing disproportionate disciplinary action, not having equitable access to educational opportunities), this interferes with their ability to self-actualize (Peters, 2019). This means that one of the most commonly cited motivations Black parents provide for homeschooling their children centers on providing "racial protection" for their children (Peters, 2019). Black parents utilize homeschooling to create a "privacy boundary" to foster an environment where their children can be and become without being targeted (Peters, 2019).

The research that has been conducted on Black families' decision to homeschool, reflects the "prevailing patterns of the racialized experiences of Black children in traditional schools, perceived or experienced" (Fields-Smith, 2020, p. 9). Consequently, race/ethnicity and experiences of racism and racial discrimination matter when considering Black families' motivations for homeschooling (Fields-Smith, 2020; Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Ray, 2015; Stewart, 2020). Fields-Smith (2020) identified five themes in the extant literature available on Black parents' motivations to homeschool including: (1) discipline disproportionality; (2) lack of sociocultural synchronization; (3) low expectations; (4) school safety and climate; and (5) marginalization of Black families in the home-school partnerships. In the sections that follow, I will use these particular motivations as buckets as I examine each of them in more depth.

Discipline Disproportionality

School discipline disproportionality has long been a tenet of inequity in K-12 education, and has been particularly prominent among students who come from low-income and/or marginalized backgrounds (Welsh & Little, 2018). In their 2015-2016 national study, *The Civil Rights Project*, conducted a comprehensive analysis of instructional days lost due to out-of-school suspensions for middle and high school students for both state and district levels (Losen & Martinez, 2020). The findings revealed that U.S. schools lost 11 million days (Losen & Martinez, 2020). Further, when disaggregated by race, the data showed that for every 100 students enrolled, Black students lost 103 days compared to their White counterparts who lost 21 days as a result of out-of-school suspensions (Losen & Martinez, 2020). When taking into account both race and gender, the findings revealed that per 100 students enrolled, Black boys lost 132 days, and Black girls at 77 days, which was seven times higher than the loss of instructional days when compared to White girls (Losen & Martinez, 2020).It is important to

note that these higher rates of disciplinary infractions are not indicative of higher rates of misbehavior, but rather, an increase in the amount or severity of disciplinary infractions (Little & Welsh, 2019). Peters (2019) explained, "Black children are not more likely to behave badly or even worse than other children; yet they are viewed as less innocent and older than White children, and are subjected to harsher and more prevalent discipline in schools" (pp. 37-38). Furthermore, existing research in this field has shown that exclusionary removal from school resulted in higher rates of contact with the juvenile justice system, and contributed to the disruption of both teacher-student relationships and student-student relationships as students feel less apt to seek help from teachers and/or feel frustration with keeping up with assignments (Little & Welsh, 2019; Welsh & Little, 2018).

More broadly, research has found that home-educated students had higher social and emotional skills/behaviors when compared to their public school counterparts (Ray, 2013). This is important as Black students attending public schools are over-referred to the criminal system and special education programs (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Little & Welsh, 2019; Mazma & Lundy, 2012; Welsh & Little, 2018). Fields-Smith and Williams (2009) shared that this is illustrated in both the speed and the ways in which schools have deemed Black students' behaviors to be problematic. In addition to the abundance of empirical research that exists in this field, findings in the form of reflections or anecdotes capturing discipline disparities through lived experience have been well documented (Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Welsh & Little, 2018). With respect to educational policy, this matters because we know that Black families and their students are being disproportionately disciplined and with that comes great harm to students, regardless of whether they leave the traditional public school setting or not. As such, policy

researchers and practitioners should be intentional in advocating for/crafting policy that addresses this.

Lack of Sociocultural Synchronization

The lack of sociocultural synchronization – which has been present over the last two decades – is a term that Irvin (1991) coined "to identify the disconnect and differences between home culture and school culture experienced by many Black students" (Fields-Smith, 2020, p. 11). An area in which sociocultural synchronization has been particularly prominent has been in the curriculum. The emphasis placed on European culture coupled with the exclusion of Black people and stories, serves not only as a form of institutional racism, but also "reinforces the racist assumption that Africa does not matter and is indeed inferior" (Mazama & Lundy, 2012, p. 726). (Re)membering Blackness in the diaspora, crucial to Black liberation and freedom, Dillard (2021) shared about the ways in which she had learned to forget, stating,

> Searching for places that affirm us body, mind, and spirit is the existential reality and real labor of Black people in the diaspora, and has been since our dispersal from the African continent…I know as a child that I searched for that reflection in the textbooks and in my teachers' faces and I did not find them (p. 28).

The standard curriculum in the United States facilitates a collective normalization of racist attitudes and stereotypes, which take shape both consciously and unconsciously (Mazama & Lundy, 2012). Mazama and Lundy (2012) shared that this is exacerbated by the fact that the majority of K-12 teachers are White and may not have the cultural knowledge necessary to teach Black students and students of color, and worse, may deny their own racial biases. Yull and colleagues (2014) wrote, "Information on racial identity development is fundamental to education regarding child and adolescent development, and all school personnel can benefit" (p.

28). Data available from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) showed that for the 2017-2018 school year, 79 percent of teachers were White, a decrease from 87 percent during the 1987-1988 school year. Also, during the 2017-2018 school year, 7 percent of teachers were Black, 9 percent were Hispanic, 2 percent were Asian American, and less than 2 percent were American Indian or Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, or identified as two or more races (Schaeffer, 2021). Comparatively, during the 2018-2019 school year, 47 percent of U.S. elementary and secondary students were White, 27 percent were Hispanic, 15 percent were Black, 5 percent were Asian, 4 percent were two or more races, and less than 1 percent were American Indian or Alaska Native or Pacific Islander (Schaeffer, 2021).

Thinking with Gee (1996), Garas-York (2010) considered the sociocultural implications of the Whiteness of curriculum, explaining "literacy as inextricable from historical conditions and practices" (p. 432). Further, he shared how discourse – a way of being and experiencing the social and material world – is acquired, not learned, and because it is tied to social and cultural capital and under the control of the dominant group, this puts Black students in school at a disadvantage. Garas-York (2010) posited that because the educational system mirrors society, this has implications on how Black people and people of color experience school. Also, the experiences Black students have with community/collectivism directly contrasts with the individualism elicited in U.S. schools (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Garas-York, 2010).

The lack of representation of Black experiences in U.S. curriculum and materials across K-12 schools is indicative of a citizenry, most of which have gone through the U.S. school system and therefore, have been taught/exposed to this type of curriculum. Thus, homeschooling is increasingly becoming an option for parents who feel that this form of school choice is the

only one that will ensure their children are learning about the history and stories of Black people (Fineman & Shepard, 2016).

Low Expectations

Fields-Smith and Kisura (2013) explained, "Black parents' reports defined the culture of low expectations in a variety of ways, including a lack of rigor in the curriculum, teacher acceptance of mediocre work, and teacher racial stereotyping" (p. 272). In Ray's (2015) causal-comparative study conducted to identify causal factors that might explain academic achievement differences between mostly middle-class Black homeschool and public school students in grades four to eight. The findings revealed that "having been home educated was a consistent, significant predictor of higher achievement while controlling for gender of student and the socioeconomic status of the student's family" (Ray, 2015, p. 89). This was true for Black homeschool students' reading, language, and math scores, and showed that Black home educated students outperformed their counterparts in public schools. Referencing Murphy (2012) to explain this phenomena, Ray (2013/2015) cited his theory of action, "the three planks of parental involvement," which included how much involvement parents have in their children's education, how parents take up instructional approaches for teaching and learning, and how they foster a safe learning environment (p. 89). These were more significant factors of improved achievement relative to that of students' gender, educational levels of the parents, socioeconomic status, or when a student was first introduced to these related academic content area subjects (Ray, 2015).

These findings corroborate Scott-Jones' (1987) findings around maternal teaching strategies with young, Black children which revealed that the educational and occupational differences between high-and-low-readiness mothers had minimal implications on their children's academic achievement, but rather, their involvement and influence were of

significance. Furthermore, research has highlighted the disproportionate representation of Black students in both remedial and gifted courses (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Mazama & Lundy, 2012). Thus, homeschooling for Black families becomes a way to respond to the low-expectations of traditional public schooling curriculum and disciplinary practices for Black students.

School Safety and Climate

Researchers have documented White teachers' racial insensitivity toward Black students in the form of racist statements or assignments, thus contributing to, or creating, hostile and even violent climates for Black students (Fields-Smith, 2005; Mazama & Lundy, 2012). Reflecting on his own schooling experiences in a letter to his son, Coates (2015) shared,

> I sensed the schools were hiding something, drugging us with false morality so that we would not see, so that we did not ask: Why – for us and only us – is the other side of free will and free spirits an assault upon our bodies? This is not a hyperbolic concern. When our elders presented school to us, they did not present it as a place of high learning but as a means of escape from death and penal warehousing (p. 26).

The preference for Black families to choose homeschooling can stem from a desire to foster a learning environment that is cultivated to fit the needs of their children, as it also serves to protect them from harm embedded in the school system (Dennison et al., 2020). This can include harm in relation to the persistence of White supremacy culture, as well as the carceral logics of public schooling. Love (2019), arguing that the American educational system was built on the suffering of students of color, wrote,

> This reality makes it difficult to digest the dark suffering that goes on in our schools because we want to believe that our schools can repair the sins of our nation. To mitigate

> their suffering and uphold Whiteness, dark families are given one short-sighted, often racist education reform model after another (p. 29).

As such, Black parents continue to have to navigate a system that profits from reforms aimed at helping the educational system, but ultimately keep Black children and their families under control (Love, 2019).

Marginalization of Black Families in the Home-School Partnerships

During the era of segregation, Black parents' relationships between home and the schools were described as "primarily collaborative and trusting," reinforcing a sense of community and mutual partnership (Fields-Smith, 2005, p. 131). Fields-Smith (2005) explained the close knit relationship between Black communities and schools as Black parents extended a great deal of trust to Black educators in teaching their children prior to *Brown v. Board*. Following the court ruling of *Brown v. Board*, the village mentality began to shift as the control and school leadership began to change in predominantly Black schools. Dennison and colleagues (2020) asserted that a response to the marginalization of families of color is to "re-exert their autonomy by taking ownership of the education of their children," which acknowledges that the decision to homeschool is one that is not taken lightly (p. 20). Further, they shared that because of the role of racist and discriminatory policies and practices that have been enacted at the hands of the U.S. government, a lack of trust, or loss thereof, in educational institutions might exacerbate the responsibility parents may feel to educate their children (Cooper, 2009; Dennison et al., 2020; Marchand et. al, 2019). Such policies and practices have resulted in a stratified society in which those who have been marginalized are disproportionately Black families and families of color.

Correspondingly, as a result of social relations and institutional practices, organizations are racialized and ultimately, influence individuals (Cooper, 2009; Stewart, 2020). While this has

not been widely studied within the context of schooling, Stewart (2020) elucidated that research does exist around the racial dynamics of tracking and student-teacher interactions within schools, which trickles down into race and racism between schools and families. For example see: Downey and Pribesh (2004); Ferguson (2000); and Morris and Perry (2016/2017).

Downey and Pribesh (2004) found that Black students were rated as less favorable classroom citizens than their White counterparts, however, this pattern was no longer prevalent when taking into consideration the teacher's race as students Black students' classroom behavior was rated more favorably than that of White students when placed with their same-race teachers. Ferguson (2000) used ethnographic research to understand how Black boys' identities in school are constructed and how educator's deficit thinking about this demographic contributes to being disproportionately disciplined and labeled as "at-risk." Morris and Perry (2016) shared that their analysis revealed that racial inequalities in achievement were in fact driven by school suspension, and further, African-American and Latinos are more likely to be disproportionately disciplined even within the same school. Finally, in Morris and Perry (2017) work, they concluded that White Black boys were twice as likely to receive a disciplinary referral, Black girls were three times as likely to receive a disciplinary referral than their White counterparts. This was true even when controlling for "social class, indicators of academic achievement, and all time-invariant school-level conditions that might confound racial and gender patterns in school discipline" (p. 143).

Similarities and Differences: Summarizing Black Homeschooling Motivations

In opposition from traditional arguments made for homeschooling, race is a critical piece of school choice for Black families (Stewart, 2020). With respect to school choice, Black middle-class families are usually confronted with choosing between majority White schools that

offer more material resources, and majority Black schools that lack material resources relative to majority White schools, but provide racial unity (Stewart, 2020). Additionally, this research shows that while educational preferences are largely influenced by parents' social networks, the way in which Black families make these decisions relative to their White counterparts differ, particularly as it relates to how they assess school quality. Black families are nuanced in this decision, taking into consideration the perpetuation of racial bias within schools/policies (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Stewart, 2020), whereas White families "tend to use race as a proxy for school quality" (Stewart, 2020, p. 256). In other words, White families correlate higher numbers of Black students with low resourced and low performing schools, despite the accuracy of the data, and instead, rely on the opinions and information provided by friends and family and how it impacts their social capital (Garas-York, 2010; Stewart, 2020; Welsh & Little, 2018).

Stewart (2020) argued that White mothers' use of their agency to move toward homeschooling for the purpose of cultivating a personalized learning experience for their child, is predicated on the lack of agency Black mothers experience as a result of racial discrimination and school leaders' apathy. Thus, while homeschooling mothers may share in the sentiment of inequity as it relates to school choice, but the role that racial hierarchy plays cannot be omitted. With this in mind, Stewart (2020) explained that when White mothers withdraw their children from traditional school, they usually provide rationales related to the opportunity to tailor their child's educational experience, whereas Black mothers describe school choice inequity through the lens of their lived experiences of their children being pushed out of traditional school due to the school/school leaders' perpetuation of discriminatory practices. As such, Stewart (2020) postulated,

> These decisions reflect the privilege of whiteness, as mothers are able to pick and choose when and where to consider race. These White mothers are enabled concomitantly by white privilege and schools as racialized organizations to reap the benefits of school choice, as originally intended by the policy. Black families are not granted this benefit and instead deploy school choice options to seek refuge from discrimination (p. 265).

Stewart (2020) also noted that while homeschooling may appear as being race neutral, it is not the case as White homeschooling mothers possess the privilege of whiteness which provides them with opportunistic access for deciding when to prioritize diversity with respect to race. Therefore, not considering the role of race in parental preferences for schooling provides a limited understanding of how traditional schools/policies utilize race and perpetuates racial inequity, as well as provides a severely fragmented and narrow understanding of Black homeschooling motivations.

Barriers to Homeschooling

Ray and colleagues (2021) expounded on the self-perceived barriers of those who wanted to move forward with homeschooling or aspired to homeschool. These barriers were ones they considered as potentially making it difficult for them to practice homeschooling or want to homeschool (Ray et al., 2021). This included feelings around not understanding homeschooling laws, concerns about their children's socialization (or potential lack thereof), and the knowledge needed to homeschool successfully. Additionally, the researchers stated that these findings aligned with mainstream thinking about homeschooling. Also affecting people's perceptions were barriers including one's support system, the curriculum, concern about one's self, the skills necessary to homeschool, and having access to the necessary resources (Ray et al., 2021).

Ray and colleague's (2021) study found a relationship between the negative associations with these barriers and individual's desire to homeschool (Ray et al., 2021). However, Ray and colleagues (2021) also found that some perceived barriers such as ethnic concerns or others' opinions were actually correlated with an increased likelihood to homeschool. In other words, while there were barriers and/or perceived barriers, they were not always enough to preclude individuals from moving forward with homeschooling. Still, it is important to note that additional research studies are being conducted that address Black home education which has previously been an under researched area within the field of homeschooling (Fields-Smith, 2015, 2020; Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Lundy & Mazama, 2014; Mazama, 2016; Ray 2015a).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current landscape of homeschooling is one of unprecedented growth, particularly among Black parents and families, that includes many nuanced considerations deeply entangled with the history of race and racialization in the United States. As many Black families chose to home educate their children at the start of the pandemic, more recent data has shown that this trend did not decrease even as on campus schooling options returned to the traditional K-12 setting (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Simultaneously, the teacher attrition rates have continued to increase with recent research finding that, "turnover is at its highest point in at least five years" (Barnum, 2023, para. 9).

My study fits into this current landscape as I am seeking to (re)imagine the possibilities of schooling by exploring my own experiences as a Black woman and mothers who is navigating the decision of how to educate my young children. Through autoethnographic vignettes composed over the course of a year, I will examine my own motivations and barriers in relation

to the decision to homeschool. This adds to calls for greater research on “fragile communities” (Ray 2015a) and to the minimal research on Black women’s relationship to the choice to homeschool. To my knowledge, there have not been any other studies that have used autoethnography as a means of exploring how homeschooling decisions are made. Thus, this study adds to the literature through capturing the decision-making process through the multiple identities I assume – Black mother, researcher, and K-12 educator.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORY AND TENANTS OF BLACK FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY

Dillard (2000) asserted that there is a particular ethical responsibility that researchers and leaders are entrusted with in order to study multicultural communities and people of color with fidelity. Specifically, she writes that researchers must explore and take up alternative epistemological truths to be responsive to these communities. In doing so, the interpretation and representation of what we know and, subsequently, the discourse used to disseminate this knowledge, underscores the voices, ontologies, epistemologies, and pedagogies of those from marginalized, Black, and indigenous communities (Dillard, 2000). Drawing on the work of Asante (1988), Morrison (1993), and Thiongo (1986), scholars who have highlighted the historical importance and use of language as a tool of colonization – mental, spiritual, and intellectual – of Black and marginalized peoples in their work, Dillard (2000) asserted that if language can be used to understand one's reality, it subsequently should be able to transform our reality. In other words, language shapes how we know, what we know, and how we produce knowledge, and to study communities of color, one must use language that is grounded in those realities (Dillard, 2000). Grounded in these assumptions, Dillard (2000) developed the concept of an endarkened feminist epistemology (EFE) to bridge a gap she identified in the field of Black feminism, expanding on the nuance and language used to describe Black women's knowledge.

Reflecting on EFE's development, Dillard (2018/2021) shared that in contrast with the term "enlightened," which has been used by White feminists to describe "new and important feminist insights", she shared about how she marshaled the term *endarkened*. In her book, she wrote,

> Embodying a distinguishable difference in cultural standpoint based in our intersectional socializations of race, gender, and other identities and the historical and contemporary contexts of oppressions and resistance for African American women, including the oppressions and dismissal of our spiritual knowings as theoretical and epistemological tools for us to think with (Dillard, 2021, p. 15).

In an effort to dismantle traditional and oppressive political and sociocultural constructions used within research and leadership, EFE uses the phrase "*research as a responsibility*" to highlight Black women's knowing and being within educational research and inquiry (Dillard, 2018, p. 619). Moreover, Dillard (2018) shared that EFE should not be conflated with dominant forms of white male science as it acknowledges that logical thought is inherent amongst different cultural groups, but acknowledges that this develops differently from one group to the next.

In considering the significance of Black feminist thought, Collins (1989) asserted that this was more complex than proving that Black women are capable of producing knowledge, but rather that,

> Such thought can encourage collective identity by offering Black women a different view of themselves and their world than that offered by the established social order. This different view encourages African-American women to value their own subjective knowledge base. By taking elements and themes of Black women's culture and traditions and infusing them with new meaning, Black feminist thought rearticulates a consciousness that already exists (p. 750).

Subsequently, she wrote, grounding research in Black women's culture and traditions becomes a way in which Black women can resist oppressive and dominant ways of knowing and being (Collins, 1989; Cooper, 2009). Black feminist theory problematizes racism and the social

constructs erected to maintain racist, sexist, classist, and exploitative forms of thinking (hooks, 1994; Cooper, 2015; De Sousa & Varcoe, 2021). Black feminist epistemologies make possible (re)imagining Black futures, and are a response to what Cooper (2015) named "acts of intellectual colonization" – maintaining that Black feminists must,

> No longer concede the logic that demands that our intellectual real estate be mowed down and swept up in the lineal march of academic and 'intellectual' progress. We must, stop letting others fuck with our future. I said it, and I mean it (p. 18).

Black feminist theory and endarkened feminist epistemology are fundamentally about (re)imagining the ways in which we produce knowledge. Thus, these theories are simultaneously philosophical and methodological, providing both the way I think about knowledge and what counts as knowledge, and the framework through which I design my study. In the following section, I continue to expand on the epistemological foundations of the theories grounding the study while mapping their methodological implications.

Key Methodological Implications of Endarkened Feminist Methodologies

Dillard (2018) described six key philosophical assumptions as important to research methodology, analysis, and representation from an endarkened epistemological ground. These assumptions include: (1) Self-definition; (2) Spirituality; (3) Language and Discourse; (4) Lived Experiences; (5) Majoritarian Narratives; and (6) Power Relations.

In the sections that follow, I will explore how each of these philosophical assumptions approach questions of power, knowledge, agency, and identity in my research design.

Assumption No. 1: Self Definition

The first assumption addresses participation and responsibility to one's community as occurring through self-definition. More specifically, Dillard (2000) argued that,

> "the struggle for a self-defined feminist consciousness for African-American women in our roles as scholars seems to require embracing both a culturally centered worldview (in this case African centered) and a feminist sensibility, both necessary in embracing and enacting an endarkened feminist epistemological stance" (p. 673).

This means that to take up an alternative epistemological truth is necessary in order to articulate and reflect the lived experiences of Black women, providing a voice where one traditionally has not been given which Dillard (2000) described as an act of resistance. Inherent to this assumption are questions of power, knowledge, agency, and identity. One must take into account power dynamics between the researcher and community by examining their "motives, methods, interactions, and final research 'reports'" (Dillard, 2000, p. 673). This shift from traditionally hegemonic understandings and knowings of who Black women are requires that the researcher, regardless of their identity/identities, must be introspective about what their personal and cultural beliefs are as these beliefs make them responsible to the community in which they are researching. How one relates to themselves influences how they in turn, relate to the community which reflects their connection and affiliation to the group in which they are engaged in inquiry about (Dillard, 2000). For my study, I consider power dynamics through autoethnographic "Life notes" or vignettes which examine how I relate to my community and the groups that I engage with as a Black woman, researcher, educator, and mother.

Assumption No. 2: Spirituality

The second assumption of an endarkened feminist epistemology takes up the pursuit of spiritual tradition as a means of de/reconstructing truth in addition to knowledge production, traditionally used independently for this purpose. Drawing from Hill Collins' (1990) work, Dillard (2000) explained that EFE "enacts 'stepping out on faith,' whether traversing tenure and

promotion, publication, unequal power relations, just being present in the academy, or being 'pushed back to strength' as we heard in the narratives" (p. 674). Questions of knowledge and power are taken up in this respect as it challenges the dominant model of knowledge production. Moreover, questions of power, knowledge, agency, and identity are inherent within this assumption as emphasis is placed on emotions when considering the merit of an argument, taking into account spirit as expressed through individuals, and the necessity of conducting research that deems empathy as vital to its design (Dillard, 2000). This is further underscored as "individual differences are not seen as detracting from but enriching to an endarkened feminist epistemology" (Dillard, 2000, p. 674). My study challenges the dominant model of knowledge production by considering the role of emotions/emotional labor and spirituality of Black women and mothers as a means of de/reconstructing how our experiences with/in, and subsequently, outside of, the educational system as (home) educators as does my methodology of autoethnography.

Assumption No. 3: Language and Discourse

The use of language and discourse, Dillard (2000) explained, is the vehicle that is used to create new understanding. It assumes that these transformed perspectives and understandings, or truths, if you will, can transgress old ways of knowing. In other words, an EFE engages our critical consciousness which is necessary if we are to examine the contradictions that may present themselves (Dillard, 2008). The use of life notes or autoethnographic vignettes in my study will allow me to (re)imagine what schooling looks like for Black home educators and their families. Through a close engagement with the language and discourses around (home)schooling, I hope to transform my understanding of what schooling can look like.

Assumption No. 4*: *Lived Experiences

Dillard (2000) shared that using the concrete experiences of Black women, and other women of color, draw lines between Black women as researchers and individuals to that of other Black women and communities. This is integral to conducting the research as much as it is to making sense of it. The life notes, or autoethnographic vignettes in my study allows me to make sense of my own experiences as a Black researcher, mom and educator and offer implications for other Black women navigating these same choices.

***Assumption No. 5*: Majoritarian Narratives**

EFE acknowledges that omissions of Black women and women of color are a means of maintaining White male superiority as part of a larger purpose to maintain societal and educational racial and social stratification (Dillard, 2000). This assumption is predicated on the feminist thought that the voices and viewpoints of those who have been marginalized are not only necessary, but crucial to adding nuance to traditionally dominant knowings and understandings. Additionally, researchers have an ethical and moral responsibility to "engage in relevant cultural understanding and 'theorizing' that is informed by the insights of those experiencing the world as the very phenomenon being explored" (Dillard, 2000, p. 677). Historically, the narratives and lived experiences of women, particularly Black women, and the knowledge they produce, have not been valued as scholarly or rigorous. My study underscores the discourse around Black homeschooling by Black women and families through autoethnography.

Assumption No. 6*: *Power Relations

This assumption takes into account the environmental racism, sexism, and classism embedded within our society, and as such, requires that we address the power

dynamics/differentials that are inherent to this structure. An EFE, Dillard (2000) asserted, seeks to "resist and transform these social arrangements as well, seeking political and social change on behalf of the communities we represent as the purpose for research, versus solely the development of universal laws or theories for human behavior" (p. 678). My study examines my lived experiences as a K-12 educator in relation to the power dynamics inherent to how the American educational system has been structured.

Studying Black Homeschooling

In the following section, I provide an overview of previous studies that have examined black homeschooling and their methodologies. I first explore the methodology of studies that explore Black homeschooling broadly, and then zoom in to look at studies which incorporate Black feminist epistemologies to study Black homeschooling experiences. After providing this mapping, I then move on to situate my own study and my proposed methodological practices.

Overview

The experience of Black homeschooling has been explored in a variety of ways. Mazama and Lundy (2012) studied the phenomena of African American homeschooling as racial protectionism, grounded in a philosophy of Afrocentricity. Their research design and data consisted of conducting interviews and observations as well as using surveys and focus groups. The researchers subsequently used open coding, and then axial coding, as a method of analysis with the interviews they had conducted as a way of creating categories and subcategories. In addition to this, they also used the data gathered from the focus groups and observations to triangulate the data from the surveys and interviews (Mazama & Lundy, 2012).

Fields-Smith and Williams (2009) used a qualitative methodology to "investigate the ways in which Black families experience and interpret their decisions to home school," as well as

a phenomenological approach (p. 372). The researchers developed themes using a cross-case analysis, and data was gathered via interviews, surveys, and focus groups and then coded (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009). Similarly, Fields-Smith (2020) used similar methods of data generation, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys, and analysis including coding interview transcripts from which themes were constructed. In each of these studies, the themes generated through these qualitative methods sought to understand Black family's decision making as it related to their homeschooling educational preference. The use of qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups ensure that the voices of participants are listened to and heard. Additionally, through generating themes by practices of coding, researchers are able to develop findings which are easily communicable to outside audiences and policymakers.

In Conjunction with Black Feminist Epistemology

Researchers have also explored Black homeschooling practices and choice grounded in Black Feminist Epistemology. These studies use varied and creative forms of data generation and analysis grounded in a privileging of Black woman's ways of knowing and an ongoing questioning of traditional forms of knowledge production. For example, Fields-Smith (2020) work examining single Black mothers' homeschooling preferences was grounded in EFE which meant that the "study valued connections between [Fields-Smith] as an African American researcher, mother, educator, and [her] Black homeschool mothers" (p. 39). Fields-Smith kept a researcher's journal that informed her questions and understanding of the data gathered. Her journal was used to interrogate her preconceived ideas about Black homeschooling in addition to the interactions she had with research participants. Ultimately, using the research journal as data

and as a form of ongoing analysis, she created separate narratives for both her preconceived notions and her interactions with participants (Fields-Smith, 2020).

Another study conducted by Fields-Smith, this time with colleague Kisura (Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013), used the concept of homeplace from hook's (1990) writing as a theoretical touchstone. In this study, the researchers investigated Black homeschooling families' motivations, beliefs, and perceptions as a means of gaining a deeper understanding about how they used agency as an act of resistance through engaging hooks' (1990) concept of *homeplace*. Grounded in the concept of homeplace, they centered questions of agency and resistance in their analysis of interviews and focus group sessions conducted in two studies in Metro Atlanta and Metro DC. The concept of *homeplace* emphasized Black people/Black mothers use of home as a private and collective space in which they were be able to exist in the fullness of their humanity, away from all forms of societal harm, while simultaneously educating their children using emotional and pedagogical instructional strategies they feel in alignment with (Cooper, 2007/2009; Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013). Engaging with hooks' (1994) *homeplace* in this study created an opportunity to think about Black homeschooling mothers alongside of hooks (1994) in which she shared,

> from my perspective we were charting new journeys, claiming for ourselves as black women an intellectual terrain where we could begin the collective construction of feminist theory. In many black settings, I have witnessed the dismissal of intellectuals, the putting down of theory, and remained silent. I have come to see that silence is an act of complicity, one that helps perpetuate the idea that we can engage in revolutionary black liberation and feminist struggle without theory (p. 66).

Reflecting on the findings of the study, they underscored both the nuance and fresh perspective it contributed to this field, offering,

> perhaps the significance of this research is that it transcends the discussion about the motivational factors and benefits of homeschooling for black families. What this study draws into sharp relief is a rare yet positive portrayal of black family life. Much of popular media and academic representations stereotypically depict blacks as largely living in one-parent, matriarchal, poor, and undereducated households. Contrastingly, most of the families in our studies were overwhelmingly two-parent, well educated, and middle class (Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013, p. 279).

Both of these studies provide methodological examples of centering Black women's ways of knowing - the first through the use of a personal journal as form of data generation, and the second through thinking-with the concept of *homeplace* grounded in Black Feminist Epistemology. Methodologically centering Black women's experiences using Black feminist epistemology provides new/nuanced understandings of Black women's work and family (Collins, 2000). Predominantly, studies which explore the experiences of Black women's or Black families' choice to homeschool rely on data generated from qualitative methodologies such as interviews, observations, surveys, and focus groups.

Study Design

My study builds on extant literature about Black homeschooling mothers' experiences with home educating their children by adding the autoethnographic lens of working as a K-12 educator in a traditional public school setting and a new(ish) mom to twin one-year olds. Over the course of a year, I journaled and wrote memos to myself in response to the questions: *How does the experience of researching the topic of Black women choosing to homeschool their*

children influence my own decision-making to homeschool my own children? How do my various identities (mother, educator, Black woman) matter in this decision? In what ways does policy entangle with this decision?

I write autoethnographic vignettes, or "life notes" as a means of exploring my own decision-making process as a Black mother and researcher to potentially homeschool my children when they are of school age, a perspective that gives me unique insight into the educational system. Dillard (2000) shed light on, or rather, endarkened, the implications of engaging an EFE, on written text. She elaborated on a form of narrative research using what she has called life notes which "refer broadly to constructed personal narratives such as letters, stories, journal entries, reflections, poetry, music, and other artful forms" (p. 664). Life notes are an embodiment of Black women's voices meant to "illustrate the relationships of power, the contexts of opportunity (or lack thereof) and to highlight the epistemological roots and their consequent local meanings in my life and in the lives of Black women researchers more generally" (p. 664). To examine life notes, or narrative research engaging an EFE, "requires that we be seen as whole people in our actual complexities – as individuals, as women, as human" (Lorde, 1984). Life notes make possible an analysis that is grounded within the cultural context of Black women. I ground my experiences as a K-12 educator and as a Black mother in literature, both theoretical and policy and practice, as I make sense of other Black homeschooling mother's experiences in relation to my own.

While the purpose of my study is to gain further insight into other Black mothers' experiences as a means of informing my own decision-making process around possibly homeschooling my children, I do not offer my study as a final decision. I say this because we are constantly evolving. My evolution as a researcher looks significantly different than when I first

began my PhD journey, and my motherhood journey looks wildly different 17 months into my girls' lives. I do, however, believe this process helps me to understand how education can be (re)imagined, and what that subsequently means not only for my children, but for other Black mothers' children. Whether or not homeschool is my final decision for how I choose to educate my children, I believe it nevertheless acts as a powerful vehicle for agency and resistance through privileging the experiences and voices of Black women about what can be and become of education for our children. Moreover, considering the decision to homeschool is one that, for me, as a public school educator, is always in relation to the public school system.

My study will continue to give a voice to Black women whose voices have historically been marginalized, and that these voices would be highlighted particularly in the area of education. Also, this work will serve as an act of resistance around addressing racist and discriminatory policies and practices upheld and perpetuated in traditional K-12 settings through sharing my experiences as a Black educator in a well-ranked, diverse school district and how those experiences are shaping my own perception of this educational space as well as the choice to home educate. Additionally, I hope that my experiences, as documented through life notes or autoethnographic vignettes, will allow myself and other educational researchers and/or mothers to better understand the educational landscape and the policies and practices that K-12 schools need to prioritize and implement in an effort to better serve Black students and other students of color.

A large portion of my study hones in on the Metro Atlanta area as that is a space I have garnered the majority of my life experiences and educational experiences in as a K-12 student and teacher. This is important to note as the homeschool laws in Georgia are liberal and lax in that home school curriculum is not dictated in any way by the state. The Georgia Department of

Education (2024) shared that they do not promote or endorse any particular curriculum and rather, “Each parent/guardian must decide which curriculum is best for their child and then create or purchase the curriculum on their own” (para. 19). Additionally, in Georgia, the home school year must equate to 180 days for at least 4.5 hours per day, and attendance is no longer required (Georgia Home Education Association, 2024).

In the following paragraphs, I first present methodological literature on autoethnography as methodology. I then connect this methodology to my theory before examining how this methodology has been used in educational leadership and policy research. After this overview, I outline my process in relation to the proposed study.

Autoethnography

In autoethnography, writing and telling stories from lived experiences empowers voices that have been traditionally marginalized while also troubling traditional forms of knowledge production (Boylorn, 2016). In my study, I theoretically ground my methodology of autoethnography with Endarkened Feminist Epistemology (EFE) (Dillard, 2000). Thus, the tenets of EFE ground both my decision to use autoethnography and in the ways I enact my autoethnography, those of which include: assuming responsibility as the researcher to the community being researched and their well-being; acknowledging research as not only an intellectual pursuit, but a spiritual one as well; engaging in dialogue as truths are sought after and/or revealed; making sense of the lived experiences of Black women and/or other communities of color; foregrounding the voices and experiences of women of color; and resisting and transforming the social and political power dynamics for the benefit of the communities being researched (Dillard, 2000). In this study I explore the experiences of Black women and mothers, particularly those who have K-12 educator experience in the traditional

school setting, with home educating their children in juxtaposition with my own experiences as a K-12 educator and mother as a means of (re)imagining the possibilities of schooling. I will examine my own lived experiences as a Black woman, mother, researcher, and K-12 public school educator who is considering the possibility of homeschooling my own children once they are of school age. Through an autoethnographic lens, this study asks: How does the experience of researching the topic of Black women choosing to homeschool their children impact my own decision-making to homeschool my own children? What does a (re)imagined schooling experience via homeschool look like?

I conducted a search in several prominent educational research and/or policy journals using the search term "autoethnography" to examine if autoethnographic research exists in these particular spaces, and if so, how gaining insight about the kinds of educational policy questions are being used to explore educational policy issues. Additionally, I am interested in how autoethnographic research has been used to study educational administration and/or reflexive practices. The journals I examined included: Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis (n=0); Educational Researcher (n=3); American Educational Research Journal (n=2); and AERA Open: Educational Policy. In what follows I provide an overview of my findings.

Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis

Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis yielded no results.

Educational Researcher

Educational Researcher yielded nine results: four of these were book reviews, one was an AERA training announcement, and four of these were journal articles (one of these broadly referenced autoethnography as a research design in the notes section of their article). I examined

the remaining three journal articles, each of which examined how autoethnography had been taken up in educational research.

Voithofer (2005) examined the gradual cultural shift that has occurred from print to digital new media, and how its material effects have implications for how educational research is represented. This author explained that autoethnography is well suited toward incorporating and finding balance amongst the multiple voices involved in a research study (i.e. researcher, participant, reviewer, editor). As an arts-based research method, it serves as a model for technotexts to be situated in time and space and a new autobiography documentary film genre (Voithofer, 2005). Barone (2009) also examined the issues around narrative, broadly, when taken up in educational research and literature. They considered the politics of telling one's story/who has the right to tell a story, and how these stories subsequently overlap with the stories of others and the implications this may have on power dynamics.

Hughes and colleagues (2012) wrote about autoethnographic research having taken off and becoming more mainstream amongst education researchers. As such, the authors offer a "translation of autoethnography as empirical by translating information from its epistemological and methodological history across the AERA standards for reporting empirical research " (Hughes et al., 2012, pp. 209-210). To do this, they conducted a substantial literature review of blind peer-reviewed journals geared toward educational researchers of an international audience that are considered first-tier and have a 17 percent or less publication acceptance rate (Hughes et al., 2012). The autoethnographic samples they reviewed revealed that authors who take up autoethnography are incredibly intentional about their use of this methodology, including justification for why other methodologies were less suitable to use in their research. This shows that researchers employing an autoethnographic research methodology are both critically and

reflexively engaged in their research design (Hughes et al., 2012, p. 213). Notably, while Hughes (2012) argued for the validity of autoethnography as a means of understanding educational policy, no additional articles have been published on or about autoethnography in *Educational Researcher* in the decade since the article's publishing.

American Educational Research Journal

The next journal I conducted a search for "autoethnography" was the American Educational Research Journal, which yielded two results. One of these results did not reference autoethnography, but populated in the search as one of the author's biographies referenced their research interest in autoethnography. The other article, however, used autoethnographic narrative data of 27 professors of color working in PWIs to gain insight about their experiences. Stanley (2006) wrote,

> Autoethnography allowed for contextualization in that it afforded faculty of color an opportunity to relate their life stories, thoughts, feelings, values, and beliefs as they pertained to their experiences as faculty on predominantly White campuses. In addition, it allowed an opportunity for these contributing authors to share personal accounts of their experiences with the majority culture and to express how, in many cases, they have been made to feel 'othered' in academia (p. 707).

What this demonstrates is how instrumental autoethnography can be for sharing about the lived experiences for communities of color.

AERA Open

A search for "autoethnography" in the journal AERA Open yielded no results.

Educational Policy

The Educational Policy Journal yielded three results. In the first article I examined, Rivera and Chun (2023) used autoethnography to examine how power dynamics/power imbalances that have existed within research-practice partnerships (RPPs) and how the decisions made by the foundations who invest in RPPs can "reinforce or disrupt the political status quo" (p. 102). The authors use autoethnography to examine

> power dynamics that have historically existed and remain embedded in the mechanisms for supporting and sustaining RPPs [research-practice partnerships], and the strategies charitable foundation staff have at their disposal to address these explicit and implicit power imbalances. Whenever foundations invest in RPPs, each decision they make can reinforce or disrupt the political status quo. We argue that foundations have the opportunity and the responsibility to test out and learn from approaches to grantmaking that can redress these conditions (p. 102).

As such, they explained that they would begin by sharing the methodological approach of autoethnography followed by introducing two authors along with their positionality as it related to their research. Next, they shared two brief case studies that highlighted the personal experiences each author had when investing in RPPs (Rivera & Chun, 2023). This work is reflexive in nature as the authors must consider their positionality and the implications this has on their investment in the RPPs they invest in.

Duarte and Brewer's (2019) research study examined how writing teachers resist centralized curricular policy. As such, they explored Camangian's (2010) use of critical literacy pedagogy, part of an autoethnographic unit they leveraged in their South Los Angeles high school classroom. The process of writing revealed an increase in self-reflection and helped to

generate the ability to build relationships founded on compassion between students who were moved by each other's stories as they increase their ability to think critically about their lives and the lived experiences they had/would have in the future (Duarte & Brewer, 2019). Similar to Rivera and Chun (2023), Duarte and Brewer's (2019) consideration of how creating an awareness of one's self has implications for how they show up and relate to that which they are a part of.

Lac and colleagues (2022) used autoethnography to examine four inherent methodological tensions critical participatory action research (CPAR) presents and the difficulties that arise with "trying to build trust with youth researchers while meeting programmatic expectations from supervisors" (p. 145). As such, the authors call for adult facilitators of CPAR to exercise critical reflexivity in an effort to minimize any disruption within the study with respect to how adults and youth interact due to the constraints with the methodology and/or professional requirements (Lac et al., 2022).

Review of Educational Policy Journals and Autoethnography

The search for how autoethnography was being taken up in top tiered educational policy research journals revealed the underutilization of autoethnography in this particular field. This field's focus on the social and political power dynamics that have disproportionately impacted communities of color, a direct impact of the United States' history of racial stratification, means that autoethnography can be a powerful methodological tool for educational researchers. As such, my study takes up autoethnography to highlight and to (re)imagine education/policy.

Autoethnographic Vignettes

My research is grounded in Endarkened Feminist Epistemology and uses autoethnography as a way to examine power dynamics inherent to a particular system which in

my study is homeschooling. It offers a novel contribution through examining the motivation and decision to homeschool from the vantage point of a K-12 educator currently working in the traditional public school system. I document the process of considering the decision to homeschool my own two children, not yet of school age, through an autoethnographic practice of what Dillard (2000) describes as "life notes," situating this in relevant educational research literature.

The subject population is as follows: as this is an autoethnographic study, the subject population is myself, the researcher. Using autoethnography, I put my research questions in relation to my own experiences and annotations to ask what implications my experiences have for K-12 educational policy. Through this process, I begin to (re)imagine what schooling can look like. This dissertation is composed of a series of autoethnographic vignettes, each followed by a discussion that puts these vignettes in relation to homeschooling/schooling policy and/or black feminist epistemologies. Throughout my research process, I engaged in memo writing and self-reflection in relation to literature regarding homeschooling practices. In what follows I provide grounding in the literature on autoethnography as a methodological practice. More specifically, I draw from a variety of methods including memo-writing, life-notes, and autoethnographic writing to inform my own research practices.

Memo-writing

Memo writing is a foundational component of doing qualitative research. As Birks and colleagues (2008) described,

> Through the use of memos, the qualitative researcher is able to engage with their research to a greater degree than would otherwise be the case. An intense relationship is established with the data, enabling the researcher to feel a

heightened sensitivity to the meanings contained therein (p. 69).

They expounded that memoing calls for the researcher to exercise reflexivity, and in turn, researchers begin to examine their own subjectivities as they are immersed in their research participants' world (Birks et al., 2008). Moreover, referencing Charmaz (2006), the researchers argued that the most important contribution of memoing is that it maintains productivity for the researcher. Grounded in Black Feminist Epistemology, memoing through life notes become a form of culturally responsive methodology. Culturally relevant refers to qualitative methodological practices that are already inherent to how Black women exist in their lives and communities (Evans-Winters, 2021). Evans-Winters (2021) shared that various forms of creative expression – including but not limited to storytelling, reflexivity, journaling, photography, poetry, art – in conjunction with attempting to challenge previously accepted forms of knowledge tend to be both politically aligned and culturally familiar with Black women scholars. This matters for my research because my study challenges traditionally accepted notions of what school is and how it should operate, and it does this by underscoring the wisdom and lived experiences of Black women.

Autoethnographic writing

Autoethnographic writing allows imagination to meet with storytelling in which readers later make meaning of the text. Moreover, this study aims to stitch together the various facets of my own lived experiences and how these impact the decision-making process to homeschool my own children – an act of resistance and expression of agency – as a mother, educator, and scholar. My study interrogates my intersectional identities to both examine the influences and factors that Black women navigate in homeschooling choices, as well as (re)imagine what schooling looks like from a Black feminist perspective. As Boylorn (2013) described, "as an

auto/ethnographer I examine my lived experiences through a cultural lens, using creative writing techniques and research methods to interrogate my experiences while making sense of cultural phenomena" (p. 74). McDonald (2021) explained that the qualitative autoethnography differs from autobiography, but rather has features of autobiography and ethnography, and uses personal narratives as a means by which research can be conducted on relationships and sociocultural connections. Osei (2019) shared that with autoethnography,

> I am able to preserve and further archive my voice and lived experiences as a direct act of humanization within the exclusionary walls of academia. I am able to provide other Black women scholars and early career researchers with evidence preserved in the digital repository of this precise academic journal that 'intellectual activism' (Collins 2013, p. 37) which can be used as a literal and metaphorical tool to destabilize the power relations that sustain our oppression (p. 735).

Black Feminist Autoethnography

Black feminist autoethnography takes up assumptions from Dillard and Bell (2011) as "there is a need in our teaching and research encounters to recognize and understand the deeper meanings of these spiritual knowledges in our epistemologies, our educational contexts, and in our ways of engaging inquiry" (p. 343). It also takes up assumptions from Collins (1986) as,

> Black feminists have questioned not only what has been said about Black women, but the credibility and the intentions of those possessing the power to define. When Black women define themselves, they clearly reject the taken-for granted assumption that those in positions granting them the authority to describe and analyze reality are entitled to do so (p. 517).

More specifically, in my study I use the practice of "life notes" from Dillard (2000) to interrogate and theorize my experiences as a Black woman, mama, and educator in relation to policy. As Dillard (2000) explained,

> "Seen as a part of the body of research literature commonly known as narrative research, life notes refer broadly to constructed personal narratives such as letters, stories, journal entries, reflections, poetry, music, and other artful forms. However, as a form of narrative, life notes may be seen as embodying the meaning and reflections that consciously attend to a whole life as it is embedded in sociocultural contexts and communities of affinity" (p. 664).

Vulnerability and Ethics in Autoethnography

There is a great deal of vulnerability required to write about your own lived experiences and to tell stories that perhaps have been "too messy" or "too embarrassing" to share. As Boylorn (2016) shared,

> My first autoethnographic utterances were spoken like inside secrets outside. I said them in my inside voice, outside. Afraid of the consequences of admitting insecurities and fears and courage, I didn't write down my first autoethnography. I said it in an empty room in the first apartment I had all to myself. I owned my story, told it to myself outloud like an echo, with no witnesses (p. 48).

The process of (re)imagining this space for teaching and learning means examining the world around me, breaking down barriers I have built up to protect myself, and allowing myself to feel my feelings when the protective walls are no longer up (Toliver, 2019). Writing down the hard parts, the messy parts, feels like it makes these things true and real. Not that they were not before, but when they are down on paper, so to speak, the words feel alive in a way that they

were not before. Also, it feels like an act of resistance. Which is scary. Sometimes it seems that in order to be a "good" teacher, you dare not speak out against the institution. Because "good" teachers do whatever necessary to protect the institution, and oftentimes, I think that may mean being quiet.

Ethical considerations that arose as I wrote were considering how I told stories of myself and other people. Farrell and colleagues (2015) explained,

> Ethical standards must be maintained in autoethnography, as in all research. One of the main pitfalls of autoethnography includes failing to consider that confidentiality must still apply in self-narrative (p. 980).

I value the relationships I have built with my colleagues and protecting their identities was important to me. Additionally, writing about my own complicated feelings about education was difficult. How do I tell stories that reflect the complexity of the feelings I am having about home educating my children and my frustrations with the public education system without it seeming as though I am completely denigrating public education? How do I share the critiques I have about traditional public education as a teacher without coming across as a disgruntled educator? How do I share about my daughters in a way that is authentic and offers my true voice while also protecting them and their identities as they have not consented (because they are not yet able to) to being a part of my research? As such, I made methodological decisions to change details that I felt gave too much identifying information while still making an effort to maintain the essence of the stories and individuals.

At times I am reluctant to write, mainly for two reasons: (1) I wonder if I am oversharing and/or if there could be disciplinary consequences that eventually come my way as a result; and

(2) most of the time, I feel like I am just complaining. This matters because these feelings are valid. Sara Ahmed shared (2020):

> For many, surviving institutions requires trying to avoid "these encounters" [that you recognise because they happen. You try to avoid them by being silent about them if they happen or because they happen. Not to be silent, speaking out, speaking up, can be to turn yourself into a target (para. 18).

But there is purpose in "complaining." Ahmed (2021) explained, "To tell the story of a complaint made within an institution can be to tell another story about an institution. The story of complaint often counters the institution's story of itself" (para. 7). Telling stories about our experiences, particularly those about an institution, can be powerful for those who, too, have experienced a story different from the one the institution tells of itself.

Ahmed (2021) wrote,

> The more complaints are contained, the more we need to express them, to get them out, keep them alive; the more we need to sneak, to leak, to leave trails behind us so that others can find us. After all, as we have learnt, a complaint in the present can lead to an unburial of past complaints (para. 57).

There is power in giving a voice to that which has been silenced. Even more so when there is a collective of people who agree, and therefore can speak out against and/or challenge oppressive systems. Referencing Collins (2002) work, Camangian (2021) shared, "...that in order for structural (systemic) and disciplinary (organizational) domains of power to maintain their dominance, there has to be a cultural hegemony, which is essentially the social control of people based on how they think—through ideology, culture, and consciousness" (p. 30). This means that

if there are individuals within an institution who dissent, particularly in a public capacity, from the traditionally accepted norms, the established culture and ideologies can be dismantled.

The process of (re)imagining school matters. It matters with respect to Black women see themselves in relation to their children and the educational system, and further, with how they might be ostracized for choosing an "alternative" form of education for their children. Collins (1986) wrote, "When Black females choose to value those aspects of Afro-American womanhood that are stereotyped, ridiculed, and maligned in academic scholarship and the popular media, they are actually questioning some of the basic ideas used to control dominated groups in" (p. S17). Through my methodological choices, I am valuing, as Ta-Nehisi Coates says, frames for those who have traditionally been pushed out of the frame, so to speak. Thus, my research is not only offering empirical findings for educational policy and homeschooling studies, but also offering an epistemological (re)grounding of how we study these questions through my methodological choices. Through autoethnography and Black Feminist Epistemology, I challenge the existing power dynamic in the U.S. educational system, one that has mirrored racial stratification and perpetuated the dominant group's ideologies, which has been indelible to reproducing racial injustice for those who have historically been marginalized.

CHAPTER 4
NAVIGATIONS OF HOMESCHOOLING

Introduction

The memos in this section span across just over one year. They begin at the beginning of the school year with my return to the classroom as a K-12 public school teacher after stepping away from it for five years, during which I began an educational policy doctoral program. The memos conclude after the start of the following school year (my second year back in the classroom). These memos are representative of the decision-making process I have gone through/am still going through as a Black mother, researcher, and educator considering whether to eventually homeschool my twins when they are of school age. The memos are ordered in such a way that shows the progression of my thinking during this time and my engagements with the scholarly literature in relation to my own inquiry. When I returned to the classroom and thus began writing these memos, my twins were nine months old. At the cessation of the memos, my girls are three weeks out from turning two years old and have begun attending a part-time preschool. As I noted earlier in this dissertation, while my intent is to inquire into the possibilities of homeschooling my children when they reach school age, this inquiry is not intended to culminate in making a decision, per say. Rather, I am interested in understanding the landscape of this choice and its possibilities.

The title of this chapter embodies the dreams I have for my own children's education and how my lived experiences, and the lived experiences of other Black women/mothers, have acted as a compass guiding my way on this school choice journey. The titles of each individual memo acts as a plot point on a map illustrating the path I have traveled along in an effort to answer my research questions: *How does the experience of researching the topic of Black women choosing*

to homeschool their children influence my own decision-making to homeschool my own children? How do my various identities (mother, educator, Black woman) matter in this decision? In what ways does policy entangle with this decision?

Mapping the Decision to Homeschool

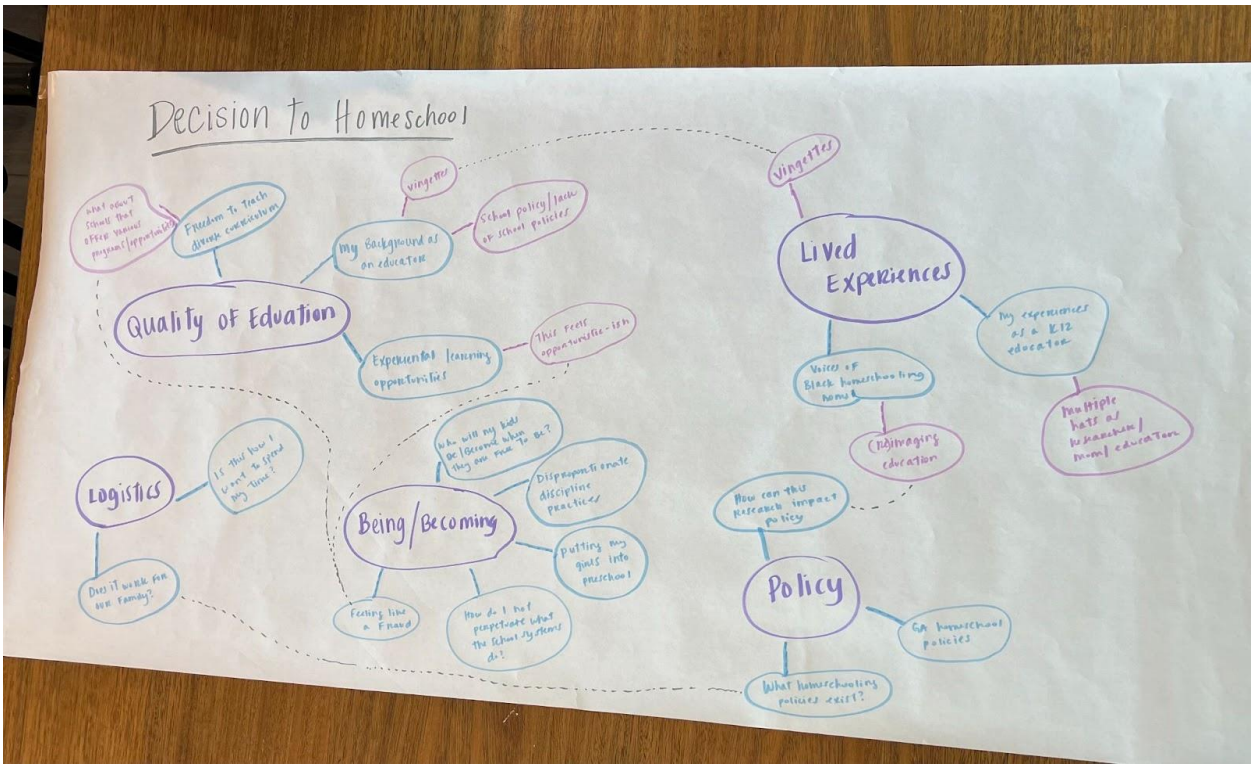

Figure 2, Decisions to Homeschool Concept Map

This concept map was created as a means of trying to organize my thoughts around factors that were/would influence my decision to homeschool my children. As such, the purple bubbles represented the main points driving my thought process around this decision: the quality of my children's education; my children being and becoming who they are and how that is impacted by their environment; my own lived experiences and the experiences of other Black women and families; the logistics of how to juggle homeschool and my kids having working parents; and the policy implications of homeschooling. The blue bubbles represented ideas fueling my main points in purple, and the pink bubbles represented ideas I might consider

touching on as I wrote through my dissertation/memos. The black dashes were drawn to connect ideas together to paint a larger picture of how the factors driving my decision-making were connected. These main factors (in purple) have become the themes representing my memos. They include: Mapping Dreams; Longing for Home; Parents, Public Schools and the Penal System; Conversations on Discipline Disproportionality; Dreaming of Balance; (Pre)school Choice; Black Mom-poster Syndrome; Navigating Doubt; The Journey Ahead; (Re)discovering Education; New Beginnings; and Dreams (Re)imagined. In what follows, this concept map becomes a way of thinking through my memos and their connections together and apart. I begin with a memo about the disproportionate discipline experienced by students of color in the classroom.

Parents, Public Schools and the Penal System

> "Ellie and Avie were hanging out everyday, but had a falling out. And you know how girls can be. My daughter said that Ellie recently threw toilet water on her in the school bathroom."

What am I reading? What is happening? My thoughts are far more colorful than I care to share in this space, but this still captures the essence all the same. My eyes feel tired and heavy, the words seem to dance across the screen as I read and re-read the words in an email a co-worker had forwarded from a parent,

I am back in the classroom as an educator after a five year hiatus and I am afraid. In this instance, not of the elephant in the school room - school shootings - which does scare me and crosses my mind every single school day, sometimes multiple times per day. Right now, I am afraid as my own girls come to mind. They are babies as I write this. Still, I can't help but to think of what will be one day when they are of school age. Is this what they are going to have to

endure? I don't know if I can raise them to be "tough." I want them to be strong and independent and to be able to stand up for themselves, but whew! This is next level. It has never crossed my mind before to throw toilet water on someone. Never. Once. Ever. Toilet water from a public restroom at that. I feel faint at the thought of someone throwing toilet water at my children.

As I contemplate this, my students begin having a side conversation. "I heard she can't come back to school for 30 days," one student said to another group of students. I look up.

"Who can't come back to school for 30 days?" I asked, intrigued.

"Indie. She beat Liv up. It was crazy! Want to see the video?!" Teenager hands gripping cell phones are now buzzing brightly in my face. It is the end of the day and as students wait to go home, they are eager to use their phones that have been tucked away throughout the school day.

"Eh, no. I heard about it. I don't want to see the video. I don't like watching people get hurt," I shared.

"Please! Please! Just a little bit," a few students plead.

I sigh, ignoring my better judgment.

I don't know whose cell phone is in front of me, but I do recognize the two students in the video. One I teach, the other I do not. They are at the bus stop, presumably in someone's front yard. The student I do not teach lifts my student up and throws her down in the yard before wailing on her.

"Okay, that's enough," I say a few seconds later, not wanting to watch anymore of it. It transported me to twelve years earlier. It, too, was the end of the day and I was a first year teacher. I had never witnessed a fight like the one I saw in my classroom that day. One of my students had returned from alternative school - where he had been sent following the physical

assault of the In School Suspension (ISS) teacher - and he had not learned to manage his anger any better. Hulk, as he later became affectionately known as, similarly had picked up another student and thrown him to the ground before punching his head into the carpet repeatedly. As I shouted and begged him to stop, I remember thinking he was going to kill the other student.

The students turn it off. They tell me that the parents of the student I teach from the video are pressing charges against the other student. You know how girls can be. These words from the email I had read just moments before from Avie's mom's feel permanently etched into my brain. What does that even mean? I think this thought to myself. I wonder, Can the fight video circulating of Indie and Liv be chalked up to girls just being girls? What does that even mean? I don't know, but it feels like it is soaked in internalized misogyny. How is it ever okay for your child to go to school and experience any of this? As a Black mom and researcher, I can't help but think: how do I create an environment that fosters a love of learning and a love of self? How can I educate my own kids in a way that does not inadvertently perpetuate colorblind practices since I, myself, am the product of such a system?

***

One year later, I am reflecting on this incident. I do not know what came of this. Both students never returned to school following this fight, and to my knowledge, I do not believe that was by way of the school/district's disciplinary policies. Still, it makes me think about how fights are now being approached, particularly by way of the parents. Something that I had not heard of prior to leaving the classroom and going to graduate school, but then had seemingly become more of a norm upon returning to the classroom several years later has been parents pressing charges against students when these types of incidents occur.

According to 2023 data from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), the state of Georgia had 1,923,756 students enrolled in K-12 schools of which 258,189 students were identified as having discipline incidents (GOSA, 2023). When aggregated by race, percent of Black students in the state had experienced a Disciplinary Incident Occurrence compared to 24 percent of White students, and 13 percent of Hispanic students. When aggregated by race and specific discipline consequence, the majority of these consequences for Black students were Out-of-School suspension, followed by In-School-Suspension (GOSA, 2023). When considering this in relation to the motivations for why Black parents homeschool their children, disproportionate discipline being a prevalent reason, there is a correlation to students being homeschool when accounting for race. The U.S. Census Bureau (2021) revealed that as of May 5, 2020, 3.1 percent of Black students were being homeschooled. This number increased to 16.1 percent of Black students being homeschooled as of October 12, 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

Conversations on Discipline Disproportionality

I heard about a conversation that happened between a teacher and administrator that had taken place several years prior. As I listened, in some ways it took me aback, and in other ways, it felt familiar. Like oh, I've read about this or experienced this before in some way. It had to do with a White student who had gotten a consequence in a teacher's classroom for having his cell phone out during a test. The fact that he had his cell phone out at all was enough to warrant a consequence per the school's cell phone policy in which students are not to have their cell phones out at any point throughout the day. The fact that it was during a test added another layer that would further warrant issuing the student a consequence. According to the teacher, when they asked the student about having his cell phone out, he lied about it to which the teacher responded that she could see it in his lap and asked him to hand it over to her. The student then

handed the teacher his cell phone which she gave back to the student at the end of the school day (the protocol teachers are asked to follow with respect to students having their phones out). Because of the amount of infractions/offenses, if you will, that the student had already received throughout the school year, the consequence for this incident would be more serious in that it would warrant an administrative referral.

The teacher called the student's parents at the end of the day to let them know what had happened and what the consequence was per the discipline policy. The parent got angry and said that all of the teachers were picking on their child and hung up on the teacher. The following day, the parents met via Zoom with the administrator, sharing that their child had participated in high school soccer tryouts after school following the incident. Apparently, the coach there had been made aware of this incident and mentioned it to the student at tryouts. Presumably, the coach was not happy about it and shared as much with the student before the start of tryouts. The parents shared that their child was distraught during soccer tryouts and felt that this negatively impacted the potential opportunity for him to make the high school soccer team. Additionally, the parent shared that their son had only had his cell phone out because he was trying to get in touch with his parents. The parent went on to share that her son has a hard time because as parents, they do not let him have social media, causing him to feel "different" from the other kids because of that.

The teacher sharing this story said that when the administrator communicated this with her, he said he had sympathized with the parents and praised their approach on their stance with not allowing their son to have social media. He also shared that he told the parents that had their son told the teacher he needed to talk to his mom, the teacher would have not given him a consequence, but that he received one because he did not communicate that with the teacher. The

teacher sharing this said that they shared with the administrator that they had been informed by other students who had also tried out for soccer at the high school that this particular student messed up during the tryouts, but only due to skill level. The administrator, however, went on to explain to the teacher that this student has had some rough circumstances in his life outside of school, sharing that his parents had him and then split up, and years later eventually got back together with each other.

What stood out to me about this conversation was how this administrator, a White man, was handling this situation particularly because how he had been described as incredibly supportive of the teachers especially around incidents regarding discipline. Hearing about this, I felt as though the administrator was giving this student grace by considering the full humanity of the student. It made me think about, more broadly, however, the documented disproportionate disciplinary incidents of Black boys across U.S. public schools that have not been afforded the same grace and consideration of their humanity.

***

I am currently deep in the process of revisiting my prospectus and reading over the literature on homeschooling. I cannot help but think that from a policy lens, this interaction was exactly what the literature describes with respect to disproportionate discipline. Martin and colleagues (2016) wrote, “What is perceived as a threat when committed by a Black student is commonly not considered a threat when committed by a white student” (p. 21). Welsh (2023) wrote that this variation in disproportionality is seen in the variation of office discipline referrals (ODR), and thus explained,

> There are vulnerable decision points or ‘contextual events or elements, such as those that increase the likelihood of implicit bias affecting discipline decision making, including a

> teacher's decision to issue an ODR or an administrator's decision to suspend the student' in the disciplinary process (McIntosh et al., 2014; Smolkowski et al., 2016, p. 180)" (p. 2).

This is problematic as both U.S. public and private schools have been headed by White teachers and administrators which has had a negative impact on the lives of Black students (Ringstaff, 2023). Hwang's (2024) research found that teachers, generally, are more inclined to view Black students as being behavioral problems, however, Black teachers had more positive perceptions of Black students which might explain the influence these educators have on Black students' disciplinary outcomes.

This is significant, particularly when considering the lack of representation of Black teachers and administrators in schools issuing these discipline consequences. Roch and colleagues (2010) findings revealed, "In schools where teachers match students by ethnicity, the discipline profile for the school seems to be oriented less toward sanctions than in schools with less ethnic representation" (p. 53). In other words, in schools where there is more racial representation between teachers and students, discipline is less likely to be punitive-oriented versus schools that have less teacher and student representation. Moreover, Roch and Pitts (2012) found,

> schools in which teachers are more representative of their target populations by race and ethnicity, there is less frequent use of punitive disciplinary practices such as out-of-school suspensions. Instead, in schools with higher levels of representation, we are more likely to observe disciplinary practices that may involve a greater rehabilitative component.

This is important because not only are these schools less likely to have punitive disciplinary practices, but also incorporate some restorative practices. This underscores the importance of having representation amongst teachers as this has a tremendous impact on the culture of a school and its discipline practices, even amongst administrators.

Dreaming of Balance

I am nervous that having a job, whether at home or at an office/school, won't allow me to home educate my children. How do people do it? How do you maintain your autonomy as a working person in the world and home educate with fidelity? It makes me interested in knowing what a typical day looks like for homeschooling families. What are they doing? How much oversight are their kids receiving? Do parents who work and homeschool feel like they're giving their kids everything they need?

***

It has been documented in the literature that time is a major talking point – in addition to identity and emotions – amongst homeschooling mothers. Lois (2013) wrote, "Homeschooling mothers talked a great deal about the challenges of apportioning their time to perform their various family responsibilities" (p. 5). The way that time is considered in relation to motherhood is important as it is a central issue for mothers who home educate and subsequently, impacts how they view their ability to perform motherhood well (Lois, 2013). It is also important to consider how these kinds of worries/stressors impact one's mental health. Baker (2018) shared,

> The impact that the additional role of teacher may have on teacher–mothers is worthy of academic attention, particularly as the prevalence of homeschooling continues to increase. Prior literature leaves space for further exploration of homeschooling mothers and mental health (p. 7).

This is important because a mother's self-efficacy, and further, their mental health, has implications on how their child will experience being educated at home.

From an educational policy lens, this may raise questions around public school and homeschool partnerships as this may help mitigate some of the questions around whether or not students are being given what they need to be successful. Dalquist (2006) shared that if "school districts adopt inclusive policies, practice implications would focus on improving communication with homeschool families, developing a range of partnership options, and streamlining processes for compliance" (p. 375). In other words, as the number of children being homeschooled in the U.S. continues to rise – which inadvertently impacts traditional public schools – it may be in the best interest of traditional public schools to partner with homeschooling families as there may be potential for curricular and/or extracurricular offerings which could generate revenue for schools as well increase participation in activities and events which also helps strengthen the community more broadly (Dalquist, 2006).

(Pre)school Choice

I recently went to tour a preschool for my girls. Doing this was driven by upcoming child care changes. I initially started researching part-time daycare options which I learned there are not a lot of options for outside of full-time care. In my search, there were some part-time preschool options that also popped up. As I explored these, I noticed that these were significantly less expensive than daycare (though almost all of the preschool options I came across were half day options). This felt like a good option for our family as I am apprehensive about sending my kids somewhere where I do not know the people who will be around them and it also feels more cost effective. The school I enrolled my girls in is a Spanish immersion program. They are 19

months old now which is a great age for language development. I also like that the program has teachers that are all native speakers.

***

Stewart (2023) shared that in her study, she interviewed Viola, a Black homeschooling mother of four where she learned that, "while individualized learning was not the primary push out of traditional schools for Black families, Viola does mention it as a benefit of her decision" (p. 122). Reflecting on my own engagements with deciding whether to homeschool my own children, I think I had internalized this feeling of enjoying the potential benefits of homeschooling as wrong. Wrong in the sense that there are Black mothers and other mothers of color who feel that they *have* to homeschool their children because it is their child's life/spirit on the line, while at times, I feel as though I am deciding in a recreational fashion if this will work for me or not. It feels like a privileged position and I am not sure what to do with these feelings. I feel a sense of guilt that I am not quite sure how to reconcile, particularly as I read Stewart's (2023) research findings in which they note that, "The white homeschooling mothers I interviewed framed their choices in terms of the Elmford schools' curricula and focus, as well as the high cost of local alternatives. They chose to homeschool to provide an education that better fit with their vision for their children" (p. 21). I cannot help but ask myself how colorism impacts the way in which I make decisions for my children and their schooling needs. Further, what schooling needs am I prioritizing, and in which ways do/will my decisions have ramifications for my children's educational outcomes and/or the impact that has on the broader community? I ask myself this because I think it would be intellectually dishonest to not acknowledge how as a light-skinned Black person, raising two children with skin lighter than my own, has had implications on the lived experiences I have had and the ones that my kids will have as well.

Black Mom-poster Syndrome

Doing this has fueled conflicting feelings I have been having recently. The biggest one is that I feel like a fraud. I feel like all the thoughts and ideas I have had about homeschooling were formed before my children were born and before they started to become the toddlers they are now. There are so many thoughts I am having now. Some of these include: not knowing if I want to be the one responsible for my kids' education, but also having self-efficacy around feeling/knowing that I could successfully educate them as I have a background in education – raising kids is so much work and while I feel like I have fallen into a comfortable and rather enjoyable rhythm of being a mother…being with my kids 24/7 is a LOT (which also makes me think about non-traditional forms of homeschooling and how it does not have to be me sitting with my kids at the kitchen); feeling like I am making decisions around homeschooling that are informed by, but not necessarily led by, the same reasons other Black mothers choose to homeschool their children – I feel like I do not know how much colorism plays into how children experience school and where I as a multiracial woman who identifies as Black, and my multiracial children, fall into this – all of which makes me feel like a fraud; feeling like as a K-12 educator, I feel less confident about the direction the education system is headed in now than I did five years ago.

***

Referencing Russell and colleagues' (1992) research, Keith and Monroe (2016) explained that "Color-based discrimination, often referred to as colorism, centers on advantages and disadvantages that people who identify as the same race experience based on the lightness or darkness of their skin tone, and other external traits (e.g., hair texture, facial features; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). With respect to education, Hunter's (2016) research noted the importance

of understanding the dynamics of colorism within schools because "colorism operates as a subsystem of structural racism. The two systems are connected and mutually reinforcing" (p. 55). Moreover, referencing Hall's (2011) work, Hunter (2016) explained that colorism within racial groups takes note of the way that skin tone within a specific group affects the discrimination and/or privileges associated with it. Hunter (2016) also wrote, "Colorism elevates and values White and Anglo aesthetics so that positive traits are associated with Whiteness and negative traits are associated with Blackness or Indigeneity" (p. 56). These biases, whether explicit or implicit, show up in various settings and interactions within school, be it between the teacher and the student, the disciplinary action(s) taken toward a student, the interactions between a family and the school, etc. (Hunter, 2016). Ultimately, this leads to disparities in education outcomes among Black and Latina/o students.

Navigating Doubt

I am having a lot of self-doubt and second guessing of myself as it relates to homeschooling my girls. I am realizing that it is an enormous undertaking, even if you are a stay-at-home parent. This is the first summer since I have been teaching that I have had my twins. I think before now, I had idealized and perhaps romanticized this time during the summer that I would have with them. I envisioned doing all of these activities and crafts with them, essentially creating some sort of a "trial" homeschool schedule/environment with them in an effort to give myself an idea of what it may be like to home educate my kids. Maybe I set myself up for failure – they are still really young (at the time I am writing this, they are 19 months old). Or maybe I am just not self-motivated enough to implement something like this. The task of taking care of their basic needs – feeding them, changing them, and just overall caring for them in general – is

so time consuming that when I get through with one task, I am looking at the clock and prepping for the next thing that needs to happen/get done.

There is some solace in knowing that much of this will change as they get older and become more self-sufficient, but right now, in the thick of it, I don't know how I could manage creating an environment that I feel would be truly enriching for them. I'm starting to wonder if I am equipped to give them the same sort of structure and learning environment that a traditional public school could. It leads me to think about what the trade off is – would I be preserving my own sanity, per say, at the expense of potentially putting my kids in an environment that could be detrimental to their emotional well-being? What is the cost benefit of home educating your kids if you as the parent are not in a headspace to do it? I shared with my partner that next summer, the twins have to go to some form of child care for at least a couple days a week because it is a lot and I feel as though it is difficult to be present with them and simultaneously accomplish anything else.

A friend of mine, a Black woman and mother, Sydney*, has been homeschooling her 8 year old son since he began school, shared with me that as of late she has been oscillating between wanting to send him to public school and having him stay home because she is afraid of sending him into an environment that could potentially be harmful for him emotionally. A concern she has that has prompted her to consider sending him to traditional public school is that she feels like he struggles to connect with other kids when they go out and notices that he gravitates to adults in social situations. She speculated that perhaps he is more comfortable around adults since he is around them more often than other kids. Ultimately, for this upcoming school year, she has decided to continue homeschooling him as she feels like the risks outweigh

any potential benefit. She has, however, decided to enroll him in a program offered in Decatur called Moonrise.

Moonrise is designed for kids ages 5-14 and is targeted toward children who are homeschooled. Their website states, “Kids are the best humans. So we built a world just for them. Beautiful spaces where they can build things, make friends, and learn together. Friendly guides who motivate them to push past limits. Real-world experiences in subjects like space exploration, climate change, and healthy cooking. Built-in community where they can be part of something bigger than themselves” (Moonrise, 2024). They share that they have a makerspace with tools and art supplies, a studio with professional recording, a library with a rolling ladder and reading nooks, more than 100 plants and a lot of windows for natural lighting, healthy snacks, music, and flexible seating. It is $299/month for students to attend 1-3 times per week with a weekly maximum of 12 hours (if you exceed 12 hours, it is $20/hour). The founder of the program, Chris Turner, wrote,

> “...why hasn't our education system changed in the last two decades? Why do schools still teach the same subjects, in the same format, to the same age groups, in the same classrooms, on the same schedule? Reimagining education is the biggest opportunity in modern history. It's the opportunity at the root of all other opportunities, from curing cancer to sustainable energy.
>
> So when my son started pre-k back in 2019, I dedicated myself to building it. Here's what I found. Learning is only half of what goes on at school. The other half is childcare. But schools have a monopoly on childcare for kids five and older. If you break up the monopoly, you can build an entirely new world. One that empowers creativity and independence, not standardization and obedience. That's why I started Moonrise.

Our mission is to build the real world for kids" (Moonrise, 2024).

***

In considering the conversation I had with this homeschooling mom, her choice to homeschool her son out of an abundance of caution around his well-being rather than risk him going to traditional public school is supported in the literature. Stewart (2023) wrote, "I found that Black homeschooling mothers prioritize family by educating children in the safety of their home rather than in racially risky traditional schools" (p. 128). I do wonder, however, how Moonrise factors in. I do not know the racial demographics of the program, but the photos on their website of the students there make me question the racial diversity of the program. Are programs like this more of the same, so to speak? What I mean by this is I wonder whether or not this homeschooling mother would be putting her son into an environment that could potentially be likened to the ones (environment) she has been shielding him from through homeschool, and/or the racial discrimination that comes with that.

The literature states that the,

> unequal treatment of Black students relative to their white peers results in the naturalization of power arrangements and the oppression faced by Black students. These discriminatory practices contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline, in which Black students' behavior is criminalized and results in early contact with law enforcement. It is no wonder that among Black students there is lowered trust in schools, a lowered feeling of belonging, and a lowered sense of personal agency (Stewart, 2023, p. 83).

This is important because such discriminatory practices contribute to life outcomes that can perpetuate Black students becoming a part of the carceral system. I think it is important to note that the outcomes for Black students who experienced disproportionate disciplinary practices and

its contribution to the school-to-prison pipeline may not be completely comparable to the outcomes for Black students participating in a part-time homeschool program who experience discriminatory practices. This is not to minimize those experiences because they are still harmful even if not in a compulsory education setting, and further.

Also, I cannot help but think about my own thoughts around homeschooling my own children. It reinforces the feelings of either my selfishness, or my feelings of being a fraud as I think about my motivations to homeschool, or lack thereof. I did not anticipate the emotional weight of this decision to homeschool one's children. Up until this point, it has been largely theoretical and ideological. Now, my decision feels at odds with perhaps my own perceived identity of being a Black mother and how I make (educational) decisions for my children. Huguley and colleagues (2023) wrote,

> Black parents and caregivers are charged with not only the universal burdens of parenthood, but also helping their children process and remain hopeful in the face of these and other racialized experiences in our society. Indeed, the effects of these events are felt by Black youth in schools (p. 251).

Reading these scholars' work makes me feel as though my feelings are valid. I am not only tasked with being a parent which in and of itself requires you to be "on," so to speak, 24/7. There is this added layer of navigating our own experiences of racism and discrimination while also trying to help our children do the same…and still remaining hopeful. Lois (2012) explained, "As I explored homeschoolers' emotional culture, I saw that it borrowed a great deal from contemporary definitions of intensive mothering. Surprisingly little research has specifically investigated the emotional culture of motherhood, despite cultural stereotypes of women as

emotional and the prevalence of emotional norms that are often implicated in the social construction of good mothering" (p. 42).

Additionally, Lois' (2012) research on the emotional labor of homeschooling mothers revealed that very scant research has been conducted on the temporal and emotional intersectionality of mothers' identities. Further, "Mothers who taught their children at home had to adjust to the demands of adding the teacher role to their repertoire of other family roles. Although a few mothers had previously been professional teachers, for most the role was entirely new. As they adjusted to the demands, many women experienced various types of role strain, which typically led to problematic emotions" (Lois, 2012, p. 95). It is reassuring that none of what I am feeling is novel, but it makes me think about the complexities associated with race.

The Journey Ahead

I am worried about my baby girl. She is such a wonderful, loving, energetic little human and I want the very best for her all the time. Both my girls, of course. But in particular, I have some concerns about my littlest one. She has been exhibiting some signs of autism and that scares me. This is all based on what I know and research I have done on my own time. She is 20 months and very rarely responds to her name. She rarely, if ever, interacts with her twin sister – it's like she doesn't exist. Her sister always wants to spend time with her, hug her, cuddle with her, and she could not be less interested. I feel as though she has regressed with her speaking – she used to respond to a variety of animal sounds when asked and here recently, she will respond to maybe two of them. She started doing some stim-like movements with her hands over the past few days. She just seems different when compared developmentally to her sister. I took her to the doctor who I shared these concerns with. He said he was not quite sure if anything was wrong or

not, and that developmentally, he thinks she is probably okay, but said it never hurts to get an evaluation, so he shared the resources to get the ball rolling on that.

I cannot help but wonder about all the what ifs, if my baby does have autism or any other type of specific learning need(s). What does this mean for her future? What does this mean for her schooling? It feels like this further complicates the reality of Black children/children of color in the school system. What assumptions would be made of her? Would these be based on her specific learning needs or on her skin color? Will her evaluation be fair or will assumptions be made of her because of her race/ethnicity? What implications does this have on my possible homeschooling journey? Also, it feels ironic to be contemplating all of this as someone currently working as a special education teacher in the U.S. public education school system. Ironic because shouldn't I be best suited to educate a child who could potentially have specific learning needs? Shouldn't I be standing firmly behind the special education services and accommodations traditional public schools offer to students with special learning needs? I feel like the answer should be yes to these questions, but truth be told, I do not know.

***

> Hurlbutt (2012) explained autism spectrum disorders as being,
>
> characterized by impairment in social interaction and communication, as well as restricted or stereotyped patterns of behavior or interests (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Common social traits include inability to respond to social cues; problems with turn-taking; difficulty establishing and maintaining eye contact; difficulty with reciprocal social interactions; and failure to recognize and read facial expressions, body language, and social cues (p. 1).

People with ASD have varying individual needs and while one treatment may work for one child, that same treatment may not work for another child. Additionally, traditional schooling can be overly stimulating and exhausting for those on the autism spectrum, all of which can have a negative impact on learning (Hurlbutt, 2012). As such, homeschooling can provide families with the flexibility to tailor the curriculum to fit their child's needs. Moreover, homeschooling might provide a child with a more quiet, safe environment (i.e. from bullying, loud classrooms, etc.).

Considering autism in Black students, Hannon (2017) wrote, "Symptoms of autism are assessed differently between children of different racial and ethnic groups, as well. Recent trends suggest almost one-half (48%) of Black children with autism are dually diagnosed with an intellectual disability, compared to 25% of White children (CDC, 2014)" (p. 155). Additionally, when compared to White children, researchers have found that Black children are two and a half times less likely to receive an autism diagnosis during their initial specialist appointment. Instead, they are five times more likely to receive an adjustment disorder diagnosis or two and half times more likely to receive a conduct disorder diagnosis (Golson et. al, 2022; Hannon, 2017; Obeid et. al, 2021; Ramclam et. al, 2022). Disparities in identifying children with autism "pose significant threats to appropriate education and intervention as underidentification obstructs receipt of needed services while overidentification can misappropriate services to students not in need of intervention" (Golson et. al, 2022, p. 1424). In other words, children who have been misdiagnosed may end up receiving services they do not actually need and/or do not fully address their needs.

Moreover, there are policy implications that must be considered in addition to this. Merry (2020) explained that "for many children with autism, injustice already begins with school

administrations and staff lacking the basic awareness, let alone preparedness, necessary to acknowledge that fairness norms also extend to those whose abilities deviate from the average" (p. 9). This means that even if children, particularly Black children, do receive an appropriate diagnosis, they are still likely to attend school and experience an additional layer of injustice, on top of any racism/discrimination, as administrators and educators may lack awareness, be it intentionally or not. Merry (2020) shared that parents know their child's interests better than that of school professionals. From a school choice perspective, particularly that of home education, one could argue that consequently, parents might be better able to serve their children if they do have special needs that place them in an inclusive environment. Merry (2020) explained their position, stating, "I argue that inclusion for children with autism in the 'least restrictive environment' (LRE), if it is to be justice-enhancing, must permit and even encourage pragmatic alternatives to the regular state/public school" (p. 10). This is important because the least restrictive environment, from an American education viewpoint, has been traditionally considered to be in a general education classroom typically within a traditional public school. However, it should be considered that perhaps the least restrictive environment may not be in a traditional public education facility, but rather at home.

It is important to note that the 2004 reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), called for "public schools to identify, locate, and evaluate children with disabilities or suspected of having disabilities whether or not they attend public school (CRHE, n.d.)" (Carlson, 2020, p. 12). As such, parents who home educate their children are entitled to free evaluations, and should their children be eligible for special education services, they can receive an individualized education plan (IEP). Still, it is the onus of the parents to follow up on/accept such

services (if they so choose), which varies widely from state to state/across school districts (Carlson, 2020).

However, an important consideration is how to provide services to homeschooled students. Drawing on Knickerbocker (2001) and Lambert's (2001) work, Carlson (2020) explained,

> The lack of definitions of public and private schools, coupled with the absence of even a mention of homeschools in federal laws governing education, contributes to pronounced uncertainty when it comes to the question of providing services to homeschooled students eligible to receive such services (p. 12).

I think this begs the question of not only what does it look like to provide services to a child who has been identified as needing specialized instruction, but how does one assess whether or not that student is being adequately served? In my role as a special education teacher, creating, implementing, and tracking progress on an IEP is quite involved. There is a team of educators all working together to craft and execute this document meant to help the student reach their academic potential. Part of this includes creating individualized goals for the students and then collecting data to measure progress on a particular goal. Different teachers, depending on the goal/class, are responsible for monitoring that goal and providing specific accommodations outlined in that student's IEP. It is a considerable undertaking which makes me think about how this could be done at home. Or at the very least, how this can be done without a formal partnership with a public school system who provides such services. This does not, however, take into account the distrust some parents, particularly students from communities of color, may distrust a school system they feel has failed and/or discriminated against their child.

On the contrary, however, Black families who choose to home educate their children move away from their child being misidentified for needing special education services once they assume agency over their child's education. Students with "soft disabilities" (i.e. disabilities with subjective classifications) are more likely to be misidentified, versus that of students with "hard disabilities" (i.e. hearing or vision) (Garwood & Carrero, 2024). As such, Black students were found to be disproportionately overrepresented and served in special education for soft disabilities, such as emotional disturbance (ED). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (2017) defined ED as,

> a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:
>
> a) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;
>
> b) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;
>
> c) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
>
> d) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression;
>
> e) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

Moreover, it outlined ED as including schizophrenia, noting that ED does not apply to "children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance under paragraph (c)(4)(i) of this section" (IDEA, 2017).

In response to those who might ask why it would be considered a negative as special education is designed to help students, Garwood and Carrero (2024) explained, "over-

representation of an entire group denotes and perpetuates the notion that there is something inherently defective within this group" (p. 122). It is important to remember that the identification of students with disabilities does not happen in a vacuum. These decisions and processes are influenced by "Teacher perceptions, student poverty, racial biases, and the sociohistorical context of schools and other institutions" (Murphy et al., 2024, p. 5). This means that these subjective disabilities and the identification of students, particularly students of color, are rooted in bias (Murphy et al., 2024). Thus, parents who choose to homeschool put themselves in a position where they are working directly with their child and are subsequently able to observe their child from a vantage point free of discrimination or negative bias against their child.

(Re)discovering Education

This year feels different. I don't know if I'm different or if it's actually different, but I feel more positive about my position, my job, and my ability to have a positive influence on my students and other teachers. I immediately felt it walking into my new classroom this year (I moved classroom this school year). The energy of the room – as silly as it may sound – felt good. My big kids (step kids) came in to help me set up my room and I told them I liked the vibe of this room better than my room last school year. I thought this was funny because a few days later, another teacher and I had planned to have a meeting in my classroom. When she walked in, she stopped, looked around, and said, "I really like the vibe in here! I can't explain it, but I really like it!"

This year, I actually decorated my classroom. The previous school year, I put up a backdrop on my bulletin board along with some border, and I had a small reading area that consisted of a rug and some pillows for students (although I never got around to putting books on

the bookshelf for that space). I don't know why I left it that way, but I did. A part of me feels like it was the stress and overwhelm of having been back in the classroom after a five year hiatus with a new position I hadn't done before, or if it was how I was feeling about the school system, broadly, that contributed to that. This year, the bulletin board backdrop and border are the same, but it has language arts and social studies posters on it (the content areas I am teaching this school year). My walls aren't bare, buying books is on my list of things to do, and around my desk are countless photos of my kids/family.

Before my teaching hiatus, when I was a general education teacher, I used to create a daily slide to project for students so they knew what to expect as they came in for the day. Last school year, there were moments when I'd reflect on that and think to myself that was way too much work to do. This year, without thinking about it, I made a daily slide. I later thought to myself, "Who are you?!" Nothing has changed in terms of my life – I am still a special education teacher, my caseload has the same amount of students, etc. I don't know if this is the case, but I feel as though maybe my hope in public education is being restored? But why now? I don't know.

***

At the beginning of last school year, I went back into the classroom as a full-time teacher, graduate school student working on my PhD, and new mom to nine month old twin girls. I knew it was a lot then, but as I reflect and write it out, I am reminded of just how much I was taking on all at once. It really was/is a *lot*. It makes me think about the invisible/emotional labor of Black women teachers and how much we are carrying at any given time. Melaku and Beeman (2023) explained, "Black women faculty are not just doing 'diversity work'; they are constantly engaging in impression management, strategic maneuvering, taking calculated risks, and much

more to gain access to necessary resources and support for advancing their careers" (p. 1159). It is interesting to read this because it really puts into perspective, for me, how much of this I am thinking about and/or consciously or subconsciously engaging in this. It makes me think about how taxing this must have been on top of juggling being a new mom back to work full-time for the first time since my twins were born (and really, for the first time in five years).

Hancock and colleagues' (2020) research highlighted Alicia, a Black woman elementary school teacher candidate who decided to teach in an inner city school. The authors noted that she had great success with her students (i.e. students were not only doing well in her class, but outpacing other classes, and she had also issued zero referrals, etc.). Through Alicia's story, Hancock and colleagues (2020) explained that similarly, many Black women teachers go into the field of education armed with the belief that they have the ability to influence the lives of students, socially, intellectually, and academically. However, they then are given the responsibility of protecting Black students from ideologies rooted in white supremacy, Eurocentric curriculum, White teachers' lack of cultural competence, and varying attitudes of administration while also juggling the challenges of a lack of resources or state standards/testing (Hancock et al, 2020). Dillard (2022) posited,

> Current conversations about racial and intersectional identities are largely silent about the role of spirituality, spiritual health, and well-being in the lives of Black teachers who are often, by default, also those teachers called both to teach and to provide safe havens from the often detrimental impacts of race, gender, and inequities in education for Black and Brown students (p. 3).

From a policy context, this matters because it underscores research implications around the necessity of continuing to do research that centers and uplifts the lived experiences of Black professionals (Melaku & Beeman, 2023).

Even though homeschooling has been increasing in popularity, the vast majority of the population still send their children to traditional public schools. Hill (2000) shared,

> Critics charge that three things are wrong with home schooling: harm to students academically; harm to society by producing students who are ill-prepared to function as democratic citizens and participants in a modern economy; and harm to public education, making it more difficult for other parents to educate their children" (para. 26).

This is important to consider because there are arguments against homeschooling children as those critiquing this form of school choice say it is detrimental to traditional public schools because students take the per pupil dollars away from the schools when they do not attend (Hill, 2000).

New Beginnings

My girls are starting preschool later this month. I am really excited for them – excited for them to learn academic curriculum, to learn another language, to be around other kids their age aside from one another, for them to participate in school activities, etc. They received a small school supplies list recently which consisted of a snack bag (I am not entirely sure what this is), a water bottle, and a 1" binder. I'm excited for them to experience school. Something I am struggling with is figuring out if one of my girls has autism or not. We are holding off on having her evaluated because we want to see how attending school could help with some of the socialization/speech concerns we have (her pediatrician shared that school could be helpful in these areas). My partner and I have been working with her and really keeping a closer eye on her

and we feel like we have seen some progress. Our favorite thus far has been her playing with her sister! They were in their ball pit together and I noticed my daughter I have concerns about looking at her sister in the eyes as they "splashed" the balls out of the pit. It was as though they were egging each other on, so to speak. Just a few days ago, I saw her take interest in her sister's hair. This feels so monumental – her noticing Emerson, for us, is huge.

I think the more time that passes, the more reluctant I am feeling about homeschooling my girls. Thinking about the potential of needing to homeschool Lila perhaps, feels so overwhelming and daunting. But I know that having a child of color with special needs in the school system feels even bigger and scarier. I know the research about how labels follow children, and in a particularly negative light, Black children. The label, I think, scares me more than anything because I know how powerful they are. What would a label do to my child? Especially my child of color? To her sense of self? Her spirit? What implications could it have on her future? Maybe I have my own issues to work out and the way I perceive these things. I feel like I am having a hard time discerning between my feelings about this and what is actually true, if that makes any sense.

***

I am thinking about how this all comes together – Black homeschooling, my background as an educator, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), etc. – and what it means in totality. We know that there are various reasons that motivate Black parents/families to home educate their children in which Fields-Smith (2020) described thematically as being: (1) discipline disproportionality; (2) lack of sociocultural synchronization; (3) low expectations; (4) school safety and climate; and (5) marginalization of Black families in the home-school partnerships. We also know that with respect to historically underrepresented and/or marginalized groups of people, this may still not

capture the full picture (Mazama & Lundy, 2012). Thinking about this in conjunction with having a child with special needs calls to attention the potential added necessity of homeschooling.

Simmons and Campbell (2019) explained that no empirical studies have taken up the motivations of parents who decide to homeschool their children with ASD, and further, there are no studies of homeschooled children with ASD that quantify their homeschooling experiences. Their study built on anecdotal evidence around parents' motivations to homeschool their children with ASD and revealed that generally, parents were not leveraging evidence-based practices or educating their children with ASD using best practice standards for this particular population of students (Simmons & Campbell, 2019). This study also concluded that with respect to the content areas covered and amount of daily instruction, the majority of homeschool programming did not meet the minimum educational requirements (Simmons & Campbell, 2019). Lastly, drawing on Frederickson's (2010) work, Simmons and Campbell (2018) noted that it can be advantageous, however, for children with ASD to receive educational instruction alongside of their neurotypical peers, particularly with social behaviors.

Safer-Lichtenstein and colleagues (2020) shared, "Rates of ASD both in the educational and medical systems have also been shown to be impacted by factors related to socioeconomic status (SES), specifically caregiver education and income" (p. 2272). This matters because race/ethnicity is undoubtedly tied to socioeconomic status which means that Black students, and students from other marginalized communities, who have specific learning needs, and in this case, autism, are also likely to face yet another layer of challenges as they are less likely to receive a proper diagnosis. Additionally, Kurth and colleagues (2016) explained that outside of factors that are specific to a child for placement in their least restrictive environment (LRE) –

more access to the general education curriculum and setting (Kurth et al., 206) – within the public education system, there is a strong correlation with the state a child resides in and how it impacts placement decisions. In a study conducted by White and colleagues (2007), their findings revealed,

> there was not a great deal of change in educational placement (movement from special education to regular education classrooms) from kindergarten through the end of middle school. Children who began school in the regular education curriculum were likely to remain in the mainstream and those who started in special education often stayed there" (p. 1409).

This matters because placement decisions have lifelong implications for students (Kurth et al, 2016).

Additionally, because we know Black students are overrepresented in special education, if their educational placement is likely to stay the same for the majority of their academic careers, which may not be in the least restrictive environment, then this presents important educational policy implications. As such, homeschooling provides a means by which parents can exercise agency over their children's education (and health). Fields-Smith (2022) shared,

> Though regular education teachers typically lack the full knowledge and authority to identify special education needs in children, the narratives of Black home educators indicate that they still do so. From the accounts, it becomes clear that by homeschooling these children, Black parents have been able to avoid having to medicate their children as suggested by teachers, the watered-down curriculum found frequently in special education, and severe mistreatment (p. 7).

This is important because it is a form of resistance on behalf of Black parents/families.

The research in this field has documented the power of creating a relevant and meaningful learning environment that allows children to achieve their full potential sans a special education label (Fields-Smith, 2022). Referencing Romm's (1993) work, Fields-Smith (2020) explained,

> Black home educators experienced a sense of urgency to ensure that they did not do damage when teaching their children. This pressure stemmed from concerns regarding the perpetual societal view of the inferiority of African Americans and as a result, Black home educators tended to select structured forms of instruction instead of fully engaging in the instructional flexibility homeschooling would/should afford them (p. 136).

This makes me wonder about the extent to which my reservations about homeschooling my child are actually valid or if they are rooted subconsciously in a feeling or fear of inferiority and not giving my child what she needs. In other words, am I potentially making decisions out of my own wounding even if subconsciously? Have I unknowingly assumed feelings of being inferior just by way of being a Black person in America and it has clouded my perception of my ability to educate my children?

Dreams (Re)Imagined

I have found myself wondering here lately if there is a bigger reason I am a special education teacher. Was I meant to go through this journey with my child? How does this correlate with my decision to homeschool? What does this mean for any potential home education I do with my girls, specifically my daughter who I suspect may have autism? Maybe I am in denial or hoping it'll "go away." This was not my plan. When I set out on figuring this all out, I planned on potentially homeschooling my two neurotypical children. What does that look

like if one is neurotypical and one is neurodivergent? This has become more complex than I anticipated when I first began my research on Black homeschooling.

***

Drawing on Blanchett and colleagues' (2005) work, Price-Bullock (2024) explained that at times, special education referrals are impacted by teacher-student mismatch which has implications on the overrepresentation of Black students who have been identified for receiving special education services.

Fields-Smith (2020) pondered,

> Homeschooling might also be a pathway to other types of healing, or sense of overcoming. Children who are homeschooled sometimes experienced bully behaviors. But, I wonder if removing the child from that situation in order to homeschool actually provides healing from the scars of bullying?

I thought this was an interesting question in relation to my own inquiry. When considering my own situation, I do not know the answer to that. While my daughter has not yet begun formal K-12 schooling and has not had any experiences with bullying or worse, racism or discrimination, the idea of homeschooling as a pathway to healing or a feeling of overcoming is so powerful. When I have considered the notion of healing, I have found myself thinking about it in terms of the student being homeschooled. I do not, however, think I had considered my own healing in relation to homeschooling. What healing could homeschooling my daughter(s) bring about in my life and how does my own healing benefit my daughters' lives?

Mental health therapists involved in the KidSTART program at Rady Children's Hospital San Diego observed,

> Young children's progress in treatment is often closely tied to that of their caregivers'

> well-being, which is especially true when caregivers are struggling with their own mental health, trauma, or substance abuse challenges. The caregiver's challenges contribute to the complex social–emotional and developmental needs of the children, and the immense stress on caregivers can often overwhelm them (Bial et al, 2020, p. 39).

I think this is an important point because it demonstrates how important it is for parents/caregivers to be emotionally stable because it impacts the children in their care.

CHAPTER 5

DISCOVERING JOY

Introduction

This qualitative study used autoethnographic writing in the form of vignettes which act as both my data and method of analysis. As such, my research aimed to weave together my lived experiences as a Black woman, mother, educator, and scholar in an effort to analyze how these would impact the decision-making process to homeschool my own children. The research questions my study sought to explore were:

- How does the experience of researching the topic of Black women choosing to homeschool their children influence my own decision-making to homeschool my own children?
    - How do my various identities (mother, educator, Black woman) matter in this decision?
    - In what ways does policy entangle with this decision?

Through the exploration of these questions, I sought to (re)imagine the schooling experience through (Black) (woman) homeschooling.

The purpose of my study was to gain deeper insight into Black mothers' lived experiences as a means of informing my own decision-making process to potentially homeschool my own children when they are of school age. My study does not offer a final decision on my decision to homeschool as I am in a constant state of evolution, evaluation, and transformation as a researcher and mother. Rather, I wanted this decision-making process to allow me to begin (re)imagining education, not only for my own children, but for other Black mothers' children. Throughout this process, I have privileged my own experience and voices as a Black woman, a

group that historically has been marginalized and silenced. Drawing from Ferber and Herrera (2013), Obaizamomwan-Hamilton and colleagues (2024) explained, “Lived experiences create space for the intersectional identities of Black women and girls that promote access to the tools necessary to foster a positive sense of self, and agency, and to negotiate collective power toward transformation” (p. 4). It has been my desire that this body of work would be a form of resistance for racist and discriminatory policies and practices that are inherently part of the foundation of K-12 education in the United States. Finally, my autoethnographic vignettes will have allowed myself and other educational researchers and mothers to think critically about the policies and practices that K-12 educational institutions ought to implement to serve Black and Brown students.

In the sections that follow, I will go through the implications of my study for: (1) the study of homeschooling and Black parent choice, (2) educational policy, and (3) qualitative methodology. I will then conclude this section by examining how my study influenced my (re)imagining of education. Finally, I will offer a final memo as an epilogue to my considerations as I finish this dissertation in my thinking around homeschooling.

Study of Homeschooling and Black Parent Choice Implications

Research on Black homeschooling has created space for expanding our understanding of what homeschooling is/what it looks like. It has also allowed us to (re)imagine how sites in which education takes place can serve as spaces in which agency and resistance can flourish (Williams-Johnson & Fields-Smith, 2022). Historically, we have seen the great lengths at which Black parents/families have gone to in order to be educated/educate their children. Over time, Black families’ deference for education and their involvement in their children’s education has been demeaned and subject to deficit centered research, a phenomena that is understudied, yet

vitally important to understanding Black families' preference to home educate their children (Fields-Smith, 2005/2020).

As such, Williams-Johnson and Fields-Smith (2022) encouraged researchers and theorists to take up Black homeschooling research and consider it as a form of parental involvement, one that critically examines the role of emotions and lived experiences of parents from marginalized and minoritized backgrounds in their quest to support their children's education while also being in the midst of challenges around racism and privilege.

My study continues to build on this research as it takes up my lived experiences not only as a Black mom considering homeschooling my own children, but also by including my experiences as a Black woman, K-12 public school educator, and researcher. Whether or not I choose to homeschool my twins or enroll them in a traditional public school, I hope this work has underscored my reverence for education and ensuring that my children, and the children of other Black mothers, receive a quality education. Additionally, I found myself questioning my various identities and the actual/perceived identities of my children in relation to Black homeschooling, and perhaps some of the explicit and/or implicit privilege I feel tethered to.

For example, Brown (2021), Dalquist and colleagues (2006), and Fields-Smith and Kisura (2013) noted that homeschooling families are more likely to involve parents with post-secondary education/training and they are not likely to be low-income. I found myself really grappling with this as it made me interrogate my motivations for wanting to potentially homeschool my children. I thought about the privilege to even be able to question whether or not I want to do this as there are many Black families/parents who feel that in order to protect the spirits of their children, they *have* to homeschool them. When I say this, it does not come from a deficit-minded place, but rather from a place of considering the sacrificial love that parents have

for their children coupled with their value of education. I felt tremendous guilt for weighing whether or not I *want* to do this because having the option to homeschool or not, and not having serious financial ramifications, feels like a privilege. Research tells us that while parents who homeschool their children tend to be well-educated and middle-class likely because it affords costs, time, and resources needed, marginalized and/or low socioeconomic status (SES) families still can and do move forward with homeschooling even if it may create financial hardship (Brown, 2021; Dennison et al., 2020; Stewart, 2023).

Admittedly, my children are still quite young and have only recently begun any kind of schooling outside of the home, and even then, it is a part-time program they attend a couple days a week for three to four hours at a time. Nevertheless, I am not sure if they have experienced, or the extent to which they may have experienced, racism or discrimination as they are too young to tell me what happens at school. Smalling (2022) wrote,

> The legacy and current influence of white supremacy on the structures of the United States has had significant deleterious effects on people of color. The historical legacies of slavery and colonization and their less overt but still oppressive policy sequelae prevent full engagement of people of color in the economic, social and political institutions of the USA (p. 3).

This is important to acknowledge as school tends to mirror societal structure whose tenants are deeply rooted in racial stratification and the marginalization of Black and Brown people.

My research considers the fact that while I identify as Black, I am multi-racial, and my partner and father of my children is White. One of my girls looks more like me and the other one favors her dad a bit more. Both, however, are fair in complexion. I felt that it would be disingenuous to my research to not consider this aspect of my twins or my identity. I reflect on

this in my Mapping Dreams memo when I say one of my daughters looks more like her dad who is White (at the time she had strawberry blonde peach fuzz which has grown into a light brown/auburn color) and my other daughter looks more like me, someone who is multi-racial, but identities as Black.

Subsequently, this led me to consider the role colorism will play in how they are viewed and/or treated in society, and further, how will they each experience this as they do look different from one another. Referencing Jackson's (2020) work, "Teachers have had a tendency to treat lighter skinned students in a more positive manner and have viewed these students as being more intelligent and better behaved" (Interra, 2022, p. 6). Interra (2022) continued on, stating,

> lighter skinned students are given more positive reinforcement, such as positive attention and more encouragement to pursue higher education. Darker skinned students are discouraged from more rigorous coursework and receive more disciplinary actions" (p. 6).

Thus, my girls being multi-racial positions them to experience colorism, and whether or not, or to what extent that has implications on them, does not mean it is not impacting somebody else's child in return. Even if my children are given an advantage when in a classroom full of children who all look different, it would still be at the expense of someone's child. Also, I want my children to be seen fully for who they are and not educated according to the explicit or implicit biases someone else holds.

Educational Administration and Policy Implications

One critique of homeschooling rests on concerns about homeschooled students' socialization skills. Drawing from Kunzman and Gaither's (2013) work, Carlson (2020) shared that when children attend traditional schooling, they become familiar and accustomed to the

norms and expectations of society, and as such, they are able to learn the "social fluency" needed to work effectively and build relationships with others. Referencing Bartholomew (2007), Kunzman (2009), and McMullen's (2002) research, the author continued on stating that doubts were increasing amongst educators, researchers, politicians, and other stakeholders about the effectiveness of homeschooling in preparing students to be democratic citizens as the number of homeschooled children increased (Carlson, 2020). Conversely, Carlson (2020) shared that research conducted on homeschoolers with respect to issues around adjustment and socialization revealed that they typically fare well if not better than their public school counterparts.

I think it is important to consider the role of democratic citizenship in relation to homeschooling. I think this argument fails to take into consideration the oppression that Black students, primarily Black boys, face in school when they are disproportionately disciplined and eventually find themselves removed from the learning environment. How are they taking part in acquiring these skills needed for social fluency if they are being excluded from the learning environment? Further, what message does that send to a Black child about how they are viewed in relation to the whole of the group when they are not given the benefit of the doubt, or the same compassion or consideration their White counterparts are given? I think it is important to establish an educated citizenry that is participatory in their democracy, but I think when we know that achievement and discipline gaps exists when aggregated by race, and thus, Black parents have to take it upon themselves to provide their child(ren) with the education they deserve, we have to consider what it is that we are actually replicating and reproducing. When we advocate for children to stay in the traditional public school classroom for the greater good of society despite the harm many of our Black students are being subjected to, then who exactly in society are we aiming to benefit? Koon and colleagues (2024) wrote,

> Youth disposability research contextualizes interpersonal patterns of exclusion, over policing, and punishment within this larger historical, sociopolitical, and economic context and posits that youths—particularly Black and "gang" youths—are fundamentally conceptualized as a threat to public life in modern economies (p. 211).

I cannot help but think about Black students and students of color being disproportionately disciplined and excluded from the traditional school classroom setting as being inherent to the racial and social stratification that has been established in the U.S., and thus, part of the social norms that have been constructed and replicated in schools. Anderson (2022) shared that many states and school districts have been working toward reducing exclusionary discipline (i.e. decreasing the length of suspensions, getting rid of mandatory suspensions, etc.) as well as implementing alternative approaches – which the author considered these as policy reforms and/or programmatic responses – the results of which have been mixed.

School and district administrators must continue to examine and address their schools' disproportionate disciplinary practice in light of this continuing to be an issue across the U.S. Schools and districts should frequently monitor their discipline data and engage in equity audits as an administration team and with their teachers as a means of highlighting disciplinary practices and subsequently, implementing practices that can have a positive impact. Thus, this creates a more supportive and equitable school environment, which in turn mitigates some of the reasons given for Black parents' motivation to homeschool..

During the course of my research, I began having concerns about one of my twin girls' development, more specifically, her social/communication development, or lack thereof. This led me to doing some research of my own and wondering if she might have autism. Additionally, it complicates how I move forward with respect to educating my children should my daughter need

specialized instruction to be academically successful. Before concerns about my daughter's development came about, I had already found myself having feelings of perhaps not being equipped to teach my daughters, not having the time or the mental/emotional bandwidth to take on homeschooling, concerns about losing my autonomy, feelings about whether or not they would be missing out if they did not attend traditional public school, etc.

Adding the possibility of one of my children being neurodivergent has added an additional layer of stress and fear about the future, much of which includes her education. I have questioned what it means to be a multi-racial girl *and* have special needs. How will my daughter be perceived? How will she perceive herself in relation to this, but also in isolation of others' perceptions? What will this do to her spirit? Do I have what it takes to not only educate a child, but educate a child on the spectrum? Is the best option for her education through homeschooling or in a traditional public school setting? Thinking about this as I did my research had me thinking about how much we as a society push people into assimilating into what the dominant group has deemed to be "right" and any deviation from that results in ostracization or in attempts to "fix" what is "broken." Additionally, variations exist in homeschooling regulations across states that impact many aspects of homeschooling: what is being taught, who is teaching, reporting progress, assessment practices, acquiring special education services, participation in extracurricular activities, documenting student achievement, etc. (Carlson, 2020). Also, statistics on various facets of homeschooling are not available as many states do not require parents to report student achievement or even being homeschooled.

Hooks v. Clark County School District (2000) was an important court case in which William and Catherine Hooks wanted to obtain speech therapy services from their school district in Nevada for their child, Christopher, who was homeschooled. The school district refused, their

argument resting on Christopher not being enrolled in a public school in Nevada. Moreover, they supported this by arguing that the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) leaves it to the state to determine what constitutes a public or private school (Youngberg, 2002). Thus,

> The Hooks argued that their home schooling constituted a private school; therefore Christopher belonged in category three, 'a child placed unilaterally in a private school by his parents.' The court disagreed. The Hooks court held that since the IDEA failed to define 'private school,' the determination as to whether a home school would qualify as a private school should be left to the States' discretion. What the court failed to consider, however, was the primary purpose of the IDEA: "Improving educational results, for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities" (p. 606).

As such, the Supreme Court would go on to say that the intent of IDEA should go beyond a sentence in the statute, and to ensure it upholds its intent which ultimately is to provide children with disabilities an equitable opportunity at an education (Youngberg, 2002).

With respect to school administrators, it is imperative that they actively foster culturally responsive leadership in their schools. This not only addresses the Black students and families' experiences, but also the challenges that directly contribute to increase in Black homeschooling. This, in turn, puts administrators in a position where they are working toward creating schools that are more inclusive and affirming spaces. Additionally, offering professional developments on leadership practices, anti-racist teaching, reforming curriculum to include multiple perspectives, and crafting policy that prioritizes cultural representation and equity.

Methodology Implications

Collins (2000) shared that Black Feminist Epistemologies challenge how public and private work are viewed with respect to culture, race, class, and family and as such, can have significant implications on research. I think homeschool as a form of school choice certainly elucidates this as it challenges aspects of the public and private and how we, particularly Black women and families engage those spaces. Moreover, I think it is important to consider the ways in which Black women/families who educate their children from home, their own private space, allows them to exist fully and wholly without the harms associated with traditional public school spaces. Further, the autonomy and agency it provides Black women/families with as they create an environment in which their child can exist and learn to their fullest potential.

Studies that have explored Black women's lives experiences and/or Black families' decisions to homeschool have relied on qualitative methodologies that include interviews, observations, surveys, and focus groups (Collins, 2000). Collins (2000) also shared that engaging a Black Feminist Epistemology centers Black women's experiences thus, creating new/nuanced understandings of Black women's work and/or family. My research study takes up autoethnography as means of underscoring Black women's voices and lived experiences in an effort to challenge previously erected ideals/norms for how schools ought to operate. I do this by including autoethnographic vignettes that track my decision-making progress over the course of a little over one year. As such, my experiences as a Black woman, mother, researcher, K-12 educator buttress the tenets of Black Feminist Epistemology as I seek to (re)imagine education for my children and other women's children.

Considering the use of autoethnography, Hall and Bell (2022) wrote,

> It is not a matter of simply telling one's story but instead narrating one's lived experience as embodied offerings containing critical meditations on how one might survive and thrive…The 'teacher, scholar, professor's' voice is surveilled and disciplined and thus discouraged from voicing our honest feelings about how institutional politics impact our health, wellness, and productivity (p. 12).

As such, I believe the implications of my study which takes up autoethnography allows me to present a different way of looking at how else we might *do* education, one that deviates from the traditional way(s) we have done school, so to speak, per the dominant culture. Additionally, using autoethnography has allowed me, as a Black woman, educator, researcher, and mother, to share the lived experiences that have influenced my decision about potentially homeschooling my children. It highlights my voice as a Black woman and how I see and experience the world around me. Thus, it is a voice that has a particular insight into the K-12 traditional public school world working as a public school classroom teacher, as a mother with a child who has some challenges and needs that may impact her schooling experience, and as a researcher who studies educational policy. It is a voice that is part of a group of people whose voices have traditionally been marginalized, sidelined, and discouraged from speaking up particularly about the harms that have stemmed from education's institutional politics.

Conclusion

In the U.S., education is an integral part of one's childhood experience. DeCosta and colleagues (2022) explained,

> Children spend more time in school than in any other formal institutional structure. As such, schools play a key part in children's development, from peer relationships and social interactions to academic attainment and cognitive progress, emotional control and

behavioral expectations, and physical and moral development (p. 80).

As such, it is important that we construct and create educational spaces that promote a child's ability to flourish. The empirical data that exists about Black children's experiences in schools has illustrated the harms that traditional public schools inflict upon them. Thus, it is important that we (re)imagine what schooling *can* look like.

My (re)imagining of education looks like parent-school partnerships in which parents have the flexibility to educate their children at home how they see fit, but can opt, if they so choose, to have regular, ongoing communication with the school system. This would allow parents to access necessary tools and resources for educating their child, but also still provide the autonomy and agency for the parents to use those tools/resources however they see fit which homeschooling provides.

Final Memo

My daughter who I have had developmental concerns about had her first official evaluation yesterday with the state's early intervention program. She was found eligible for the program as they noted she had good motor development, but mild cognitive and adaptive development as well as significant delays in speech and language development, social interaction, and receptive and expressive language. While I suspected these things already, it still does not prepare you for receiving the professional assessment feedback. It just becomes that much more real. I am not certain what interventions my daughter will need yet. The team has to meet still to discuss their findings and craft a plan tailored to her needs. I asked the service coordinator how intensive these therapies might be and she responded that it depends and gave the example that some kids may have 30 minutes of speech therapy per week. Granted this was just an example, I found myself thinking what is 30 minutes per week going to do for a toddler

who has significant delays? After the evaluation, I found myself feeling sad for my daughter, and discouraged by the potential interventions as the example provided by the service coordinator does not seem like enough.

I feel that this meeting lit a fire for me to go ahead and move forward with getting my daughter officially evaluated for autism. In my heart, I feel as though I already know what the result of that assessment will be, and as painful as that may be because it is not what I envisioned for her, and selfishly, for my own parenting journey, it will provide my girl with access to additional resources and interventions that hopefully put her in a position to improve various areas of her development. I have to advocate for my child and I need to make sure she receives whatever services are necessary for her to reach her highest potential. In one week from today, my daughters will have their two-year old appointment and I plan to ask their pediatrician for a referral to a developmental pediatrician who can evaluate her for autism.

This newest development has renewed a spark for me around homeschooling my daughter(s). If my daughter does have autism, I will more than likely pull her out of the school she is currently in so that she can attend whatever therapies are recommended. This raises some concerns for me because it means that my twins, for the first time in their lives, will be separated. Writing that last sentence left me holding my head in my hands, fighting tears. I have always wanted them to stick together, which I know there are different schools of thought around twins staying together or being separated particularly as it relates to school. Research literature from the 1960s shared that twins should be separated as a means of better helping develop independence from one another socially, intellectually, and emotionally, and as such, schools would develop policies to physically separate twins from one another at school (Faulkner, 2009). However, more contemporary research literature posits that there is actually no research basis for

such policies and, further, “What research has been done suggests that there is no general benefit to separating twins in school, and in some cases, it might be detrimental” (Faulkner, 2009, p. 5). Garon-Carrier and colleagues (2021) shared that a research study revealed that in a survey of 131 elementary school principals, 71 percent of principals believed that twins should be separated and perform better academically when separated; however, the researchers noted that there had not been any twin studies conducted that supported the claim that twins fair better academically when separated at the elementary level. In the U.S., twin placement policies are enacted at a state level. Georgia Code § 20-2-71 (2023) states,

> (a) For purposes of this Code section, the term ‘higher order multiples’ means triplets, quadruplets, quintuplets, or more.
>
> (b) A school must place twins or higher order multiples from the same family together in the same classroom if the children are in the same grade level at the same school and meet the eligibility requirements of the class, and the children's parent or legal guardian requests the placement, unless factual performance evidence shows proof that these specific students should be separated. The parent or guardian must request the classroom placement no later than five days before the first day of each school year or five days after the first day of attendance of the children during a school year if the children are enrolled in the school after the school year commences (Justia U.S. Law, 2023).

In other words, the state of Georgia allows for twins and higher order multiples to be placed together in the same classroom if the parent requests and certain requirements have been met (i.e. attend the same school, are in the same grade, etc.) unless there is evidence that otherwise shows that they should not be placed together.

My daughters being close and having one another is important to me. My hope is that any separation would only be temporary and that eventually my daughter would be in a place developmentally where she and her sister could be together, literally or metaphorically, within their education. However, whether or not they are, it leaves me questioning if home education would be in my girls' best interest. So, I end my dissertation with considering what my next steps are in this journey, beginning with potentially working part-time to support my daughter, which for me, feels like a real first step at dipping my toes in the homeschooling pool, so to speak. I envision this as taking the tools she would have received at therapy, perhaps, and implementing them at home, but in a way that I feel best serves her while also including her twin sister in whatever educational model I see as being most beneficial.

As a special education teacher, ironically, I do not feel prepared to educate my child with special needs. In my (re)imagining of education, I envision there being a better developed partnership between home and school in which teachers are able to give parents the tools they need to educate their children at whatever particular educational/developmental level they are at. I believe this would give parents the agency to still teach their children how they would like, but still equip them with high-leverage tools and instructional strategies that are research-based so that they are empowered to home educate their child while also increasing their self-efficacy.

One of the first conversations I ever had with a Black homeschooling mom was with my friend Sydney, whom I shared about in my Mapping Decisions memo. When I spoke with her recently, she shared that she wanted to get her son a science kit so they could do science experiments together. She said that she had also bought them both lab coats and goggles. I loved hearing her excitement as she spoke about this and how she intended to bring the material to life, so to speak, by pretending to be scientists. I wanted to bottle up that joy at that moment. That is

how education should be – exciting, joyful, safe. It left me thinking about all the possibilities with my own children. I pictured my daughter, who I have shared my concerns about in my dissertation, dressed up and doing science experiments when she is a little older. I felt hopeful for her future and for her education, and empowered as a mother and educator because I can create that kind of palpable joy for my kids too. It leaves me thinking about how I can learn from the experiences I am having with my daughter right now as I navigate this nebulous (for me) space around what she will eventually need to be successful? From the perspective of a parent, how can I create partnerships with various professionals/the school system to create a bridge between what my daughter needs and what she needs to get there? How can I begin to structure a homeschool environment/curriculum that sparks curiosity and joy for my kids? How can I best and most effectively share what I learn with other Black homeschooling moms/families?

References

ACLU of Florida. (2022, April 22). ACLU of Florida condemns bill that prevents discussions of race and gender discrimination in schools and workplaces, signed into law by governor DeSantis. [News Release]. https://www.aclufl.org/en/press-releases/aclu-florida-condemns-bill-prevents-discussions-race-and-gender-discrimination

Adams, C. (2023, February 8). Black families are changing the educational landscape through communal home-schooling. *NBC News*. Retrieved from https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/black-families-are-challenging-educations-status-quo-home-schooling-rcna69027

Ahmed, S. (2020, March 23). Complaint and survival. *feministkilljoys*. https://feministkilljoys.com/2020/03/23/complaint-and-survival/

Ahmed, S. (2021, June 16). Complaint as feminist pedagogy. feministkilljoys. https://feministkilljoys.com/2021/06/16/complaint-as-feminist-pedagogy/

Alexander, K. & Alexander, M. D. (2005). *American public school law: 6th edition*. Thomson Learning, Inc.

Allen, S. (2019, September 20). Social media's growing impact on our lives. American Psychological Association. https://www.apa.org/members/content/social-media-research

Anderson, K. P. & McKenzie, S. (2022). Local implementation of state-level discipline policy: Administrator perspectives and contextual factors associated with compliance. *AERA Open, 8*(1), 1–20.

Atterbury, A. (2023, July 20). New Florida teaching standards say African Americans received some ‘personal benefit’ from slavery. *Politico*. https://www.politico.com/news/2023/07/20/florida-black-history-teaching-standards-00107067

Bacon, E. (2019). *Writing speculative fiction: Creative and critical approaches*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Baker, E. E. (2018). Motherhood, homeschooling, and mental health. *Sociology Compass, 13*(9), 1–7.

Balingit, M. & Rabinowitz, K. (2021, July 27). Home schooling exploded among Black, Asian and Latino students. But it wasn’t just the pandemic. *The Washington Post.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2021/07/27/pandemic-homeschool-black-asian-hispanic-families/

Barone, T. (2009). Comments on Coulter and Smith: Narrative researchers as witnesses of injustice and agents of social change? *Educational Researcher, 38*(8), 591-597. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X09353203

Barnum, M. (2023, June 27). The teaching profession is facing a post-pandemic crisis. *Chalkbeat*. Retrieved from https://www.chalkbeat.org/2023/6/27/23774375/teachers-turnover-attrition-quitting-morale-burnout-pandemic-crisis-covid/

Bartholet, E. (2016). Thoughts on the liberal dilemma in child welfare reform. *William & Mary Bill of Rights Journal, 24*(725), 725-732.

Bartholet, E. (2020). Homeschooling: Parent rights absolutism vs. child rights to education & protectionism. *Arizona Law Review, 62*(1), 1-80.

Bhatt, R. (2014). Home is where the school is: The impact of homeschool legislation on school choice. *Journal of School Choice, 8*(1), 192–212.

Bial, V., Hazen, A., & Slyvester, K. (2020). Healing the young child by helping the caregiver implementing an intergenerational approach. *Zero to Three, 41*(1), 38–44.

Birks, M., Chapman, Y., & Francis, K. (2008). Memoing in qualitative research: Probing data and processes. *Journal of Research Nursing, 13*(1), 68–75.

Boylorn, R. M. (2013). Blackgirl blogs, autoethnography and crunk feminism, *Liminalities, 9*(2), 73-82.

Boylorn, R. M. (2016). On being at home with myself: Blackgirl autoethnography as research praxis, *International Review of Qualitative Research, 9*(1), 44-58.

Brown, H. (2021). *Homeschooling the right: How conservative education activism erodes the state*. Columbia University Press.

Brown, P. M. (2008). Bad boys: Public schools in the making of Black masculinity. *International Journal of Multicultural Education, 10*(1).

Camangian, P. R. (2021). Let's break free: Education in our own image, voice, and interests. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 54*(1), 28-38.

Carlson, J. F. (2020). Context and regulation of homeschooling: Issues, evidence, and assessment practices. *School Psychology, 35*(1), 10–19.

Cheng, A. & Donnelly, M. (2019). New frontiers in research and practice on homeschooling. *Peabody Journal of Education, 94*(3), 259–262.

Chingos, M., Baird, C., Feng, A., Hinson, D., & Peiffer, E. (2024). Data tool: Explore your school's changing demographics. *Urban Institute*. Retrieved from https://www.urban.org/data-tools/explore-your-schools-changing-demographics

Coates, T. (2015). *Between the world and me.* Spiegel & Grau.

Collins, P. H. (1986). Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of Black feminist thought. *Social Problems, 33*(6), S14-S32.

Collins, P. H. (2000). Gender, Black feminism, and Black political economy. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 568*(1), 41–53.

Cooper, C. W. (2007). School choice as 'mother work': Valuing African American women's educational advocacy and resistance. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 20*(5), 491-512.

Cooper, C. W. (2009). Parent involvement, African American mothers, and the politics of educational care. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 42*(4), 379-394.

Cooper, B. C. (2015). Love no limit: Toward a Black feminist future (in theory). *The Black Scholar, 45*(4), 7–21.

Cooper, B. S. & Sureau, J. (2007). The politics of homeschooling: New developments, new challenges. *Educational Policy, 21*(1), 110–131.

Dahlquist, K. L., York-Barr, J., & Hendel, D. D. (2006). The choice to homeschool: Home educator perspectives and school district options. *Journal of School Leadership, 16*(1), 354–385.

Davies, L. (2019, June 4). Social media data in research: a review of the current landscape. SAGE Ocean. https://ocean.sagepub.com/blog/social-media-data-in-research-a-review-of-the-current-landscape

DeCosta, D. B., Ward, D. G., & Cornell, M. (2022). Reimagining education: Restore, rebuild, curate, uplift, and celebrate. *Current Issues in Comparative Education, 24*(2), 71-87.

Dennison, A., Lasser, J., Awtry Madres, D., & Lerma, Y. (2020). Understanding families who choose to homeschool: Agency in context. *School Psychology, 35*(1), 20–27.

De Sousa, I. & Varcoe, C. (2021). Centering Black feminist thought in nursing praxis. *Nursing Inquiry*, 29(1), 1–10.

Dillard, C. B., & Bell, C. (2011). Chapter twenty-one: Endarkened feminism and sacred praxis: Troubling (auto) ethnography through critical engagements with African Indigenous knowledges. *Counterpoints, 379,* 337–349. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42980906

Dillard, C. B. (2000). The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen: Examining an endarkened feminist epistemology in educational research and leadership. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 13*(6), 661–681.

Dillard, C. B. (2008). A whole sense of self, a whole sense of the world: The blessings of spirituality in qualitative research and teaching. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 1(1), 81–102.

Dillard, C. (2018). Let steadfastness have its full effect: (Re)membering (re)search and endarkened feminisms from Ananse to Asantewaa. *Qualitative Inquiry, 24*(9), 617–623.

Dillard, C. B. (2021). *The spirit of our work: Black women teachers (re)member*. Beacon Press.

Dills, A. (2022). Homeschooling and child safety: Are kids safer at home. *Journal of School Choice, 16*(4), 529–554.

Downey, D. B., & Pribesh, S. (2004). When Race Matters: Teachers' Evaluations of Students' Classroom Behavior. *Sociology of Education, 77*(4), 267–282.

Duarte, B. J., & Brewer, C. A. (2019). "Caught in the nets of 'discipline'": Understanding the

possibilities for writing teachers' resistance to standardization in local policy. *Educational Policy, 33*(1), 88-110. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904818807326

Dwyer, J. G. & Peters, S. F. (2019). *Homeschooling: The history & philosophy of a controversial practice.* The University of Chicago Press.

Eggleston, C. & Fields, J. (2021, March 22). *Census Bureau's household pulse survey shows significant increase in homeschooling rates in fall 2020.* U.S. Census Bureau. https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/03/homeschooling-on-the-rise-during-covid-19-pandemic.html

Evans-Winters. (2021). Black women improvisations: Shifting methodological (mis)understandings within and across boundaries. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 34*(6), 481-485.

Farrell, L., Bourgeois-Law, G., Regehr, G., & Ajjawi, R. (2015). Autoethnography: introducing 'I' into medical education research. *Medical Education, 49*(1), 974–982.

Faulkner, C. (2009). Placing twins in school: Guiding parents on whether to separate or place twins together in school. *The Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Letter, 25*(3), 5-7.

Ferguson, A. (2000). *Bad boys: Public schools in the making of Black masculinity*. University of Michigan Press.

Fields-Smith, C. (2005). African American parents before and after Brown. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision, 20*(2), 129–135.

Fields-Smith, C. (2020). *Exploring single Black mothers' resistance through homeschooling*. Palgrave McMillan.

Fields-Smith, C. & Kisura, M. W. (2013). Resisting the status quo: The narratives of Black homeschoolers in Metro-Atlanta and Metro-DC. *Peabody Journal of Education, 88*(3), 265–283.

Fields-Smith, C. & Williams, M. (2009). Motivations, sacrifices, and challenges: Black parents' decisions to home school. *Urban Rev, 41*(1), 369–389.

Fineman, M. & Shepherd, G. B. (2016). Homeschooling: Choosing parental rights over childrens' interests. *University of Baltimore Law Review, 46*(1), 57–106.

Florida Department of Education. (2023). *Florida's state academic standards – social studies, 2023*. https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/20653/urlt/6-4.pdf

Gaither, M. (2009). Homeschooling in the USA: Past, present and future. *Theory and Research in Education, 7*(3), 331–346.

Garas-York, K. (2010). Overlapping student environments: An examination of the homeschool connection and its impact on achievement. *Education and Urban Society, 42*(4), 430–449.

Garcia, P., Fernández, C., & Okonkwo, H. (2020). Leveraging technology: how Black girls enact critical digital literacies for social change. *Learning, Media and Technology, 45*(4), 345–362.

Garon-Carrier, G., Bégin, V., Brendgen, M., Vitaro, F., Ouellet-Morin, I., Dionne, G., & Boivin, M. (2021). Classroom placement and twins' social behaviors in elementary school: Providing empirical evidence to inform educational policy. *Educational Policy, 36*(7), 1850-1875.

Garrett, R., Radina, R., & Beasley, C. (2024). Abandonment in the classroom: Urban education, I nternalized racism, and the school-to-prison pipeline. *Teacher Educator, 59*(1), 7–21.

Garwood, J. D. & Carrero, K. M. (2022). Lifting the voices of Black students labeled with emotional disturbance: Calling all special education researchers. *Behavioral Disorders, 48*(2), 121–133.

Georgia Department of Education (2024). Home schools. Retrieved from https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Pages/Home-Schools.aspx

Georgia Home Education Association. (2024). Georgia Law. [GHEA]. Retrieved from https://ghea.org/georgia-law/

Ginwright, S. A. (2002). Classed out: The challenges of social class in Black community change. *Social Problems, 49*(4), 544-562.

Golder, S., Ahmed, S., Norman, G., & Booth, A. (2017). Attitudes toward the ethics of research using social media: A systematic review. *Journal of Medical Internet Research, 19*(6), 1–19.

Golson, M. E. , Haverkamp, C. R., McClain, M. B., Schwartz, S. E., Ha, J., Harris, B., & Benallie, K. J. (2022). Influences of student race/ethnicity and gender on autism special education classification considerations. *Autism, 26*(6), 1423–1435.

Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2023). K-12 Student Discipline Dashboard. Retrieved from https://public.gosa.ga.gov/noauth/extensions/DisciplineDashV1/DisciplineDashV1.html

Green-Hennessy, S. (2014). Homeschooled adolescents in the United States: Developmental outcomes. *Journal of Adolescence, 37*(1), 441–449.

Guterman, O. & Neuman, A. (2017). The role of family and parental characteristics in the scope of social encounters of children in homeschooling. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 26*(10), 2782–2789.

Hall, A. R. & Bell, T. J. (2022). The pedagogy of renewal: Black women, reclaiming joy, and self-care as praxis. *Journal of Communication Pedagogy, 6*(1), 9-19.

Hancock, S. D., Showunmi, V., & Lewis, C. (2020). Teaching while Black and female: Navigating mental, curricular, and professional aggression. *Theory into Practice, 59*(4), 409–418.

Hannon, M. D. (2017). Acknowledging intersectionality: An autoethnography of a Black school counselor educator and father of a student with autism. *The Journal of Negro Education, 86* (2), 154–162.

Haugh, B. (2014). Hesitation to resolution: Our homeschooling narrative. *Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning, 8*(16), 1–11.

Hernholm, S. (2024, May 2). Rise of homeschooling is making a transformative impact on education. *Forbes.* Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/sites/sarahhernholm/2024/04/30/rise-of-homeschooling-and-its-transformative-impact-on-education/

Hill, P. T. (2000). How home schooling will change public education. Brookings. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-home-schooling-will-change-public-education/

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress*. Routledge.

Interra, V. L. (2022). The role of skin tone in beliefs about children in early childhood classrooms [ProQuest Information & Learning]. In *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering* (Vol. 84, Issue 2–B

Hughes, S., Pennington, J. L., & Makris, S. (2012). Translating autoethnography across the AERA standards: Toward understanding autoethnographic scholarship as empirical research. *Educational Researcher, 41*(6), 209-219. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X12442983

Hunter, M. (2016). Colorism in the classroom: How skin tone stratifies African American and Latina/o students. *Theory Into Practice, 55*, 54–61.

Hurlbutt, K. (2012). Special education teachers' perceptions and beliefs regarding homeschooling children with autism spectrum disorders. *Home School Researcher, 27*(1), 1–9.

Jamison, P., Meckler, L., Gordy, P., Morse, C. E., & Alcantara, C. (2023, October 31). Homeschooling's rise from fringe to fastest-growing form of education. *Washington Post.* Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/interactive/2023/homeschooling-growth-data-by-district/

Jenkins, D. A. & Warren, C. A. (2024). Towards anti-carceral leadership: Remaking public schools to refuse Black students' surveillance, containment, and control. *Educational Policy, 38*(3), 624–641.

Justia: U.S. Law (2023). Section 20-2-71 - Placement of twins or higher order multiples in the same classroom. Retrieved from https://law.justia.com/codes/georgia/title-20/chapter-2/article-3/section-20-2-71/#:~:text=(b)%20A%20school%20must%20place,the%20placement%2C%20unless%20factual%20performance

Keith, V. R. & Monroe, C. R. (2016). Histories of colorism and implications for education. *Theory into Practice, 55*, 4–10.

Knight Steele, C. (2021). When the Black lives that matter are not our own: Digital Black feminism and a dialectic of self and community. *Feminist Media Studies, 21*(5), 860–863.

Koon, D. S-V., Pham, H., Jordan, C., Haro, B. A., Harris, J. A., Huddlestun, D., & Prim, J. (2024). Racial capitalism and student disposability in an era of school discipline reform. *American Journal of Education, 130*(2), 207-237.

Kosinski, M., Matz, S. C., & Popov, V. (2016). Facebook as a researcher tool. *American Psychological Association*. https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/03/ce-corner

Kunzman, R. (2012). Education, schooling, and children's rights: The complexity of homeschooling. *Educational Theory, 62*(1), 75–89.

Kurth, J. A., Mastergeorge, A. M., & Paschall, K. (2016). Economic and demographic factors impacting placement of students with autism. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 51*(1), 3–12.

Lewis, A. E. & Diamond, J. B. (2015). *Despite the best intentions: How racial inequality thrives in good schools*. Oxford University Press.

Little, S. J. & Welsh, R. O. (2019). Rac(e)ing to punishment? Applying theory to racial disparities in disciplinary outcomes. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 1*(1), 1–21.

Jason, K., Wilson, M., Catoe, J., Brown C., & Gonzalez, M. (2023). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black and Hispanic work outcomes: A scoping review. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities, 11,* 1157–1172.

Lois, J. (2012). *Home is where the school is: The logic of homeschooling and the emotional labor of mothering*. New York University Press.

Losen, D. J. & Martinez, P. (2020). *Lost opportunities: How disparate school discipline continues to drive differences in the opportunity to learn*. Retrieved from https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/school-discipline/lost-opportunities-how-disparate-school-discipline-continues-to-drive-differences-in-the-opportunity-to-learn/Lost-Opportunities_EXECUTIVE-SUMMARY_v17.pdf

Love, B. L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. Beacon Press.

Lubienski, C., Puckett, T., & Brewer, T. J. (2013). Does homeschooling "work"? A critique of the empirical claims and agenda of advocacy organizations. *Peabody Journal of Education, 88*(3), 378–392.

Marchand, A. D.,Vassar, R. R., Diemer, M. A., & Rowley, S. J. (2019). Integrating race, racism, and critical consciousness in Black parents' engagement with schools. *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 11*(1), 367-384.

Martin, J. L., Sharp-Grier, M., & Smith, J. B. (2016). Alternate realities: Racially disparate discipline in classrooms and schools and its effects on Black and Brown students. *Leadership and Research in Education: The Journal of the Ohio Council of Professors of Educational Administration (OCPEA), 3*(1), 16–33.

Mazama, A. & Lundy, G. (2012). African American homeschooling as racial protectionism. *Journal of Black Studies, 43*(7), 723–748.

McDonald, E. M. (2021). This ain't what I'm used to: Reflections of a Black educator in rural Black America an autoethnography. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas, 94*(3), 94-105.

McDonald, K. (2023, June 23). Homeschooling remains a popular option, while defying stereotypes. Foundation for Economic Education. Retrieved from https://fee.org/articles/homeschooling-remains-a-popular-option-while-defying-stereotypes/

Medlin, R. G. (2013). Homeschooling and the question of socialization revisited. *Peabody Journal of Education, 88*(3), 284–297.

Melaku, T. M. & Beeman, A. (2023). Black women in white academe: a qualitative analysis of heightened inclusion tax. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 46*(6), 1158–1181.

Merry, M. S. (2020). Do inclusion policies deliver educational justice for children with autism? An ethical analysis. *Journal of School Choice, 14*(1), 9–25.

Miles, K. (2021, December 13). *More Black families are homeschooling their children, citing the pandemic and racism*. NPR. https://www.npr.org/2021/12/13/1061787233/more-black-families-are-homeschooling-their-children-citing-the-pandemic-and-rac

Milner, H. R. (2020). Fifteenth annual AERA *Brown* lecture in education research disrupting punitive practices and policies: Rac(e)ing back to teaching, teacher preparation, and *Brown*. *Educational Researcher, 49*(3), 147-160.

Mordechay, K. & Orfield, G. (2017). Demographic transformation in a policy vacuum: The changing face of the U.S. metropolitan society and challenges for public schools. *The Educational Forum, 81*(2), 193–203.

Morris, E. W. & Perry, B. L. (2016). The punishment gap: School suspension and racial disparities in achievement. *Social Problems, 63*(1), 68–86.

Morris, E. W. & Perry, B. L. (2017). Girls behaving badly? Race, gender, and subjective evaluation in the discipline of African American girls. *Sociology of Education, 90*(2), 127-148.

Murphy, J. (2014). *Homeschooling in America: Capturing and assessing the movement*. Skyhorse.

Murphy, H., Cole, C., & Bolte, H. (2024). Race placed: Special education identification and placement of Black students. *Educational Policy*, 1–24.

National Constitution Center. *Wisconsin v. Yoder (1972).* Retrieved from https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/supreme-court-case-library/wisconsin-v-yoder-1972

Oakes, J. (1985). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality*. Yale University Press.

Obaizamomwan-Hamilton, E., Norris, A., Elsinbawi, M., Paley, M., & Cohen, A. (2024). Femmenoir pedagogies: rescripting the reproduction of Blackwomen's marginalization in education. *Race Ethnicity and Education*.

Oh, P. J. (2019). Homeschooling, freedom of conscience, and the school as republican sanctuary: The Romeike family case. *Peabody Journal of Education, 94*(3), 355–368.

Osei, K. (2019). Fashioning my garden of solace: A Black feminist autoethnography. *Fashion Theory, 23*(6), 733-746.

Parsons, B. M. (2020). The effects of risk, beliefs, and trust in education policy networks: The case of autism and special education. *Policy Studies Journal, 48*(1), 38–63.

Pasque, P. A., Patton, L. D., Gayles, J. G., Gooden, M. A., Henfield, M. S., Milner, H. R., Peters, A., & Stewart, D-L (2022). Unapologetic educational research: Addressing anti-Blackness, racism, and White supremacy. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies, 22*(1), 3-17.

Peters, N. R. (2019). The right to be and become: Black home-educators as child privacy protectors. *Michigan Journal of Race & Law, 25*(1), 21-59.

Piotrowski, C. (2015). Emerging research on social media use in education: A study of dissertations. *Research in Higher Education Journal, 27*(1), 1–12.

Ramclam, A. M., Smoots, K. D., & Daniels, F. M. (2022). Autism disparities for Black children: Acknowledging and addressing the problem through culturally responsive and socially just assessment practices. *Psychology in the Schools, 59*, 1445–1453.

Ray, B. (2013). Explaining the change in homeschooling, 1970-2010. *Home School Researcher, 29*(1).

Ray, B. (2013). Homeschooling associated with beneficial learner and societal outcomes but educators do not promote it. *Peabody Journal of Education, 88*(3), 324–341.

Ray, B. (2015). African American homeschool parents' motivations for homeschooling and their Black children's academic achievement. *Journal of School Choice, 9*(1), 71–96.

Ray, B. D., Shakeel, M. D., Worth, F., Bryant, V. (2021). Four key barriers affecting the choice to homeschool: Evidence from a fragile community. *Journal of School Choice, 15*(2), 194–214.

Redford, J., Battle, D., & Bielick, S. (2017). Homeschool in the United States: 2012. U.S. Department of Education. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016096rev.pdf

Ringstaff, T. N. M. (2023). Afrocentric education for liberation in the classroom: It takes a village to raise a child. *Education Sciences, 13*, 1-21.

Rivera, P., & Chun, M. (2023). Unpacking the power dynamics of funding research-practice partnerships. *Educational Policy, 37*(1), 101-121. https://doi.org/10.1177/08959048221134585

Ron DeSantis. (22, April 2022). *Governor Ron DeSantis signs legislation to protect Floridians from discrimination and woke indoctrination*. [News Release]. https://www.flgov.com/2022/04/22/governor-ron-desantis-signs-legislation-to-protect-floridians-from-discrimination-and-woke-indoctrination/

Roque, C. H., Pitts, D. W., & Navarro, I. (2010). Representative bureaucracy and policy tools: Ethnicity, student discipline, and representation in public schools. *Administration & Society, 42*(1), 38–65.

Safer-Lichtenstein, J., Hamilton, J., & McIntyre, L. L. (2020). School-based autism rates by state: An analysis of demographics, political leanings, and differential identification. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 51*(1), 2271–2283.

Sam, C. H. (2019). Shaping discourse through social media: Using Foucauldian discourse analysis to explore the narratives that influence educational policy. *American Behavioral Scientist, 63*(3), 333–350.

Schaeffer, K. (2021, December 10). A*merica's public school teachers are far less racially and ethnically diverse than their students.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/12/10/americas-public-school-teachers-are-far-less-racially-and-ethnically-diverse-than-their-students/

Schwartz, S. (2021, April 15). 8 states debate bills to restrict how teachers discuss racism, sexism. *Education Week.* Retrieved from https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/8-states-debate-bills-to-restrict-how-teachers-discuss-racism-sexism/2021/04

Sheehy, C. & Nayak, S. (2020). Black feminist methods of activism are the tool for global social justice and peace. *Critical Social Policy, 40*(2), 234–257.

Scott-Jones, D. (1987). Mother-as-teacher in the families of high-and low-achieving low-income Black first graders. *The Journal of Negro Education, 56*(1), 21–34.

Skiba, R. J., Eckes, S. E., & Brown, K. (2009). African American disproportionality in school discipline: The divide between best evidence and legal remedy. *New York Law School Law Review, 54*, 1071–1112.

Simmons, C. A. & Campbell, J. M. (2019). Homeschool decision-making and evidence-based practice for children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, *31*(1), 329–346.

Smalling, S. E. (2022). Overcoming resistance, stimulating action and decentering white students through structural racism focused antiracism education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *27*(5), 601-614.

Somerville, S. W. (2001). The politics of survival: Home schoolers and the law. *Home School Legal Defense Association.*

Stanley, C. A. (2006). Coloring the academic landscape: Faculty of color breaking the silence in predominantly white colleges and universities. *American Educational Research Journal*, *43*(4), 701-736. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312043004701

Stewart, M. D. (2019). "I don't talk to anyone about homeschooling": Familial supports among White and Black mothers. American Sociological Association.

Stewart, M. D. (2020). Pushed or pulled out? The racialization of school choice in Black and White mothers' (home) schooling decisions for their children. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, *6*(2), 254–268.

Stewart, M. D. (2023). *The color of homeschooling: How inequality shapes school choice*. NYU Press.

The Nation's Report Card (2022). National achievement-level results: Overall NAEP achievement levels. Retrieved from https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/nation/achievement/?grade=8

Toliver, S.R. & Miller, K. (2019). (Re)Writing reality: Using science fiction to analyze the world. *English Journal*, *108*(3), 51-59

U.S. Department of Education (2017). Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Sec. 300.8 (c) (4). Retrieved from https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/a/300.8/c/4

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). *School Choice in the United States: 2019* (NCES 2019-106), Indicator 5.

Vliet, A. V. (2023). Are we in this together? Why embracing aspects of child care in school is vital to reimagining education. *LEARNing Landscapes*, *16*(1), 271-284.

Voithofer, R. (2005). Designing new media education research: The materiality of data, representation, and dissemination. *Educational Researcher, 34*(9), 3-14. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X034009003

Warren, S. D. & Brandeis, L. D. (1890). The right to privacy. *Harvard Law Review, 4*(5), 193-220.

Welsh, R. O. (2023). Up the down escalator? Examining a decade of school discipline reforms. *Children and Youth Services Review, 150*, 1-13.

Welsh, R. O. & Little, S. (2018b). The school discipline dilemma: A comprehensive review of disparities and alternative approaches. *Review of Educational Research, 88*(5), 752–794.

White, S. W., Scahill, L., & Klin, A. (2007). Educational Placements and Service Use Patterns of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 37*(8), 1403–1412.

Williams-Johnson, M. & Fields-Smith, C. (2022). Homeschooling among Black families as a form of parental involvement: A focus on parental role construction, efficacy, and emotions. *Educational Psychologist, 57*(4), 252-266.

Youngberg, S. (2002). Hooks v. Clark County School District: IDEA and the new inequality – the denial of subsidized services to private educated children with disabilities. *Whittier Law Review, 2*, 597-615.

Yull, D., Blitz, L. V., Thompson, T., & Murray, C. (2014). Can we talk? Using community-based participatory action research to build family and school partnerships with families of color. *The School Community Journal, 24*(2), 9-31.

Appendices

IRB Approval

Submit Determination

Oct 26 2023

Author: Jessica Lasebikan (VPR-Human Subjects)
Logged For (Submission): Dreams of Home: (Re)imagining Schooling Using Speculative Fiction as Black Researcher Mama
Activity Date: 10/26/2023 1:58 PM

Activity Form | Property Changes | Documents | Notifications

Submit Determination

Not Human Subjects Review

1. * Determination Date:
   10/26/2023
2. * Determination Type:
   Not Human Subjects Research
3. Comments:
   The proposed activity is not designed as research involving human subjects. The activity is designed to allow for the investigator's self-reflection on the decision to choose homeschooling. Data includes personal memos/reflections and publicly available information.
4. * Approval Date:
   10/26/2023
5. * Progress Report Enabled: ○ Yes ● **No**
6. * Expiration Date:
   10/26/2023