Black Girl Black Girl Holla and Let Em’ Hear You: An Autoethnographic Exploration of My Experiences From Black Girlhood to Black Womanhood

Ashá S. Jones

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Black Girl Black Girl Holla and Let em’ Hear You:
An Autoethnographic Exploration of My Experiences
from Black Girlhood to Black Womanhood

By
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San Diego State University | Claremont Graduate University
2023
Approval of the Dissertation Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Ashá S. Jones as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education.

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Abstract

Black Girl Black Girl Holla and Let em’ Hear You:
An Autoethnographic Exploration of My Experiences
from Black Girlhood to Black Womanhood

Ashá S. Jones

This critical autoethnographic study examined my experiences navigating educational institutions from young adulthood to adulthood, as seen through the eyes of a Black girl growing up to become a Black woman. Specifically, this study included an examination of 10 critical incidents with a combination of the past 7 years of my life that explain the negative and positive interactions that shaped my experiences with the educational system and society while explaining how music, self-reflective writing, and other “parent figures” (mentors) were all elements that contributed to my educational success. Drawing on Critical Race Theory, Critical Mentoring, Black Feminist Thought, and Critical Autoethnography, this study sheds light on how I, as a Black girl and woman, experienced racism, discrimination, and systems of power in K-12 and postsecondary educational systems and society. I utilized Black Feminist methodologies and qualitative inquiry to analyze self-reflective journals and a compilation of music lyrics, along with interviews with mentors/other parent figures. In my research, I analyzed 10 critical incidents in which I had to deal with issues including racism, pushout, labeling, silencing, and the need for assistance while navigating the educational complex and society at large. Across these incidents, five overarching themes surfaced: finding my voice, understanding my identity, resilience, self-actualization, and recognizing the power of community. This study aimed to emphasize the importance of more effective support networks within educational systems and society, particularly for Black girls and women.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Though back at the time, I never thought I’d see her face; Ain’t a woman alive that could take my mama’s place. Suspended from school and scared to go home, I was a fool with the big boys, I shed tears with my baby sister. Dear Mama, don’t you know I love you, sweet lady. (Mobe, 1995)

Picture this: An infant born into the system because her mother was serving time for robbery and drug violations. The infant lived with her grandmother and her two husbands because her mother would not see the light of freedom for the next 5 years because of her crimes. Along the journey of living with her grandparents, she was raised with five younger cousins and one sibling. The cousins’ mothers were addicted to drugs and serving prison time. Her grandparents were “pharmaceutical sales reps,” but not in the traditional way. As the children entered middle school, the grandparents began to teach them how to weigh and package illegal drugs for distribution. The kids learned how to hide drugs when the police came to keep the business intact. There were all kinds of strange people in and out of the home all the time. In addition to the illegal occupation, the grandparents were abusive and alcoholics.

Primary school was a struggle and caused consternation for her as a Black girl because administrators did not take the time to get to know her or understand her life away from school. On many occasions, her identity and gender played a role in disciplinary actions. While going through the K-12 system, she spent 50 times in in-school suspension and 35 times in out-of-school suspension. She began to recognize and understand that her experiences with this discipline were distinctly different from those of others.

Over the course of her education, she received the message from school leadership that she was not welcome in or out of the classroom because she was a Black girl; that she did not
deserve a better education; that she was considered at-risk and unruly; and that she would not be able to complete her education journey. She and I are the same person, and this is my account of navigating the educational complex and society.

In 1995, Tupac’s song “Dear Mama” was released. When I hear this song, I can’t help but feel Tupac’s pain as if it were my own. His struggles, exacerbated by his mother’s inability to be there for him when he needed her the most, are unraveled as he goes through his life. Assata Shakur, Tupac’s mother, appears in the remastered video for “Dear Mama,” recalling her story of being pregnant and in jail before being acquitted a month and 3 days before he was born (2Pac VEVO, 2011). Unlike Tupac’s mother, my mother was not acquitted and was sentenced to 1 to 5 years in prison before being paroled after 3 years. Tupac’s mother and my mother both battled with drug addiction, served time in jail, and were homeless (Matthews, 2018). My mother was incarcerated at the time of my birth, but she was released to give birth to me in a local hospital. My grandparents were given full custody of me. My life began in chains, but this dissertation shows how I did not fall victim to those chains.

“Dear Mama, though back at the time; I never thought I’d see her face/Ain’t a woman alive that could take my mama’s place/” (Mobe, 1995). The song played on the air for the first time when I was a senior in high school, and I instantly felt a connection to it. Tupac understood my anguish, rage, inspiration, and story. Tupac’s words are the perfect lyrics to a song about my life story. For the first time in my life, I had the sensation that someone completely knew me at my deepest level. Every day, I had the thought that Tupac was escorting me to school. He was in the same class as me. It was all because our mothers were everything we wished for but could not be or do because they were too jacked up to be there for us and did not have the capacity to. I
yearned for my mother’s affection, but she was unable to be a mother due to her imprisonment and drug addiction.

In the same way that Tupac was brought up on the streets and in the community, I was brought up on the streets and in the community. The fact that my mother would be gone for an extended time resulted in my grandparents being granted full custody. Because of their way of life, my grandparents couldn’t raise and nurture me as a young Black girl. There was nothing else on their minds because they were preoccupied with running their “pharmaceutical sales” company, raising six more grandchildren, and bailing out their children from jail.

Even within my own family, I could not find a safe haven as a Black girl understanding and growing in my Black identity. So, I, just like Tupac, was put in a situation where I had to face life on the streets, where community members helped me navigate what I refer to as “the system.” In addition, music became my mentor, parent, friend, and educator.

Problem Statement

We are living in a historical period of unrest and (re)awakening that is not unique to the history of the United States. This country experienced the same type of unrest following the Reconstruction period from 1866 to 1876, as well as in 1968 following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Watts riots, among other events. Once again, our country finds itself on the verge of a moral cliff, forcing her to face the consequences of her empty promises of democracy, liberty, and equality. Black girls and women in educational systems are still affected by systems rooted in whiteness (Cabrera et al., 2017).

Throughout my life as a Black girl and now as a woman, I have consistently embraced the mythical American dream of equal opportunities for all in education, work, and life, even though my people were shackled, mercilessly beaten, and denied fundamental human rights. I
have done my best to persist in pursuing America’s democratic ideals while trying to understand how her promise aligns with my life when there are blatantly racist laws, policies, and practices that she promulgates. According to Chisholm (1970), “Racism is so universal in this country, so widespread, and deep-seated, that it is invisible because it is so normal” (p. 133). Words have power, and they can change the trajectory of one’s life. According to the research obtained in The Culture of Education Policy, a book written by Sandra Stein (2004), the decisions made by policymakers in the K-12 education system create obstacles to the achievement of students of color. For example, policymakers decided to employ problematic but not blatantly racist language when creating the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) because of the stigmatism intended to further oppress Black people (Stein, 2004). For students like myself who were hoping to achieve success in school, scholar Stein provided a compelling history of the policy as well as its reauthorizations from 1965 through 1994.

Policies are poverty-oriented and define students according to who is dominant and who is subordinate to effect desired outcomes and condemn certain behaviors while simultaneously praising other behaviors (Bell, 2004; Stein, 2004). For example, policies that police clothing, language, and hair in school disproportionately impact Black girls. I was subjected to this policing by school officials who punished me with in- and out-of-school suspensions. These policies can alter the trajectory of Black girls and women who face structural oppression in the education system and society.

Black girls and women need policies that do not consider their Black identity to be inferior or to be feared (Morris, 2018). Policies that subject Black girls and women to disproportionate punishment must be addressed and changed. According to Morris (2018), policies that concentrate on society’s negative perceptions of Black women’s femininity or
attempt to damage Black girls and women because of how they dress or style their hair should be examined. Policies and practices that have a detrimental effect on Black girls and women in education systems and society should be abolished and replaced with methods that employ the healing and freeing power of talk (Morris, 2018).

Furthermore, one cannot help but question the moral character of the policymakers who created the policies that disenfranchise Black girls and women. Scholar Stein (2004) pointed out that we have to “investigate” the language used by Congress. These checkpoints have the power to bring about change in the education system for Black girls and women. If we can reform the classroom, we can transform society (Manjari, 2015).

For example, Shirley Chisholm did not stop arguing over the inclusion of the word “poor” in the policy. The language should be centered on poverty rather than on the deficiencies of the students (Stein, 2004). In the minds of policymakers, being poor is synonymous with being incapable of learning. Policymakers continued to assert that Black students were having difficulty in school because they came from poor families. Using myself as an example, I was born into poverty, but it did not mean I could not learn. It meant that Ashá did not have access to the tools that others who were not in poverty did. Instead of developing policies that called for action to access economic and instructional resources, policymakers continued to push their agenda of poverty and cultural deficiencies. This is because poverty and cultural deficiencies are more politically advantageous (Stein, 2004).

Black girls and women continue to suffer from the ill effects of poverty, over-policing, racism, and being pushed out and misunderstood, among other things (Harris, 2020). My story must be told if I am to be an important voice for Black girls and women. My narrative of overcoming all the obstacles I encountered is not only a critique of school policies, but it also has
the potential to contribute to the implementation of change inside educational institutions. Who knows what Black girls and women are going through and how they are navigating the world if they do not share their stories? Furthermore, if Black girls and women do not share their stories, neither academic institutions nor society will be pushed to reform.

Research has indicated Black girls within the education system are disciplined at disproportionately higher rates than white females or Black males (Greene, 2020; Morris & Perry, 2017). Research has also revealed that Black females have been suspended from school because of their clothing, their use of language judged improper towards their peers and teachers, or their use of physical aggression toward other students (Annamma et al., 2016). As a Black girl and woman going through predominantly white education systems, I, too, had these same experiences, including being suspended numerous times for the clothes I wore and the way I utilized my language. My frustration with the education system caused others to view me as a physical abuser with aggressive behavior. As a result, the system identified me with the angry Black girl and woman archetypes perpetuated in education systems and society. Brittany Cooper (2018) said that due to these experiences, Black women’s instinctive reaction to continuous oppression and racism is anger. “Anger is a legitimate political emotion,” Cooper asserted, and when “focused with precision, it can be a powerful source of energy serving progress and change” (p. 1).

Furthermore, we all express our anger in different ways. Some Black girls and women prefer silence, while others are emotional and vocal. I became angry and did not speak for a while as I digested my experiences. I sought safety in silence, believing they would be unable to harm me if I remained silent. My lived experiences left me wanting to run to someone or
somewhere where I could learn how to maneuver these spaces. I sought out mentors in the educational system to support me in understanding how to find peace and navigate the “system.”

Monique Morris (2018) contended that the leadership in the education system must work to eliminate spaces in which Black girls and women are subjected to a higher level of monitoring and punishment than their white counterparts. According to research by the National Women’s Law Center and the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund (2014), Black female students only made up 17% of the student population in the United States. However, Black female students account for 31% of girls reported to law enforcement by school authorities and 43% of students arrested on school campuses (Annamma et al., 2016). Black boys and white females in the K-12 pipeline have been the subject of extensive research (Ricks, 2014), but Black girls are frequently left out of the conversation regarding their needs in the education system (Annamma et al., 2016). Black girls become Black women and still face opposition in education systems and society rooted in being pushed out (Epstein et al., 2017). Black girls and women have experienced being regulated by the rules created by heteropatriarchal norms and social mores cultivated by the dominant culture through the lens of race and gender (Love, 2014).

*Look Back at It*

There is a historical foundation for the oppression, hardship, and regulations that Black girls and women experience in today’s climate. In 1851, Sojourner Truth addressed the crowd at the Women’s Rights Convention held in Akron, Ohio, and delivered her famous speech, “Ain’t I a Woman”:

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I
could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have taken thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman? (National Park Service [NPS], 2021)

Black women within systems of education still have the lived experiences of “the struggle” of 1851 in the year 2023. Black women are still seeking refuge in other Black women, familiar with these lived experiences of struggle. In this particular context, Sojourner Truth makes a call to action, becomes a mentor for all Black girls and women in society, and exerts herself into the place of authority as a mentor. Sojourner opened the door to mentorship, which has since blossomed into liberation for Black girls and women (NPS, 2021).

The educational system is a microcosm of our society as a whole and the oppression that Black girls and women have been subjected to since the days of enslavement. Furthermore, this history continues to affect Black girls and women, and those affects are reflected in the lived experiences as they navigate the educational complex (Collins, 2009; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Understanding the history of racism and sexism in America as well as how it impacted Black girls and women historically grounds how it continues to affect them today (Crenshaw, 1989). My research examined how power is used in schools to tell the stories of the struggles that Black girls and women face in the educational complex. I explored the historical struggles by examining the creation of educational policies and practices that exclude Black girls and women from the educational system and negatively shape their lives in relationship to the systemic nature of racism, power, and control (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007).

**Look at Us Now**

In 2023, Black girls and women experience surmounting layers of oppression within the constructs of education systems in and out of the classroom (Huff, 2019). Currently, amid a triple pandemic of COVID-19, social unrest, and mental health that has hijacked the health, life, and
wellness of Black people, the Black community is still facing complications and deaths from the virus that is almost three times greater than that for white people (Njoku & Evans, 2022).

The trauma that COVID-19 and social unrest have on Black girls and women impacts their success and mental health in the classroom and the workplace. These experiences can inform us of the colliding factors, such as the convergence of race, gender, class, lived experiences, and real-life educational experiences (Huff, 2019). The essence of Black girls and women is frequently misinterpreted as being loud, angry, disruptive, difficult to teach, unapproachable, or lacking the aptitude to achieve at a higher level (Fordham, 1993). The little Black girl is now still living through these perceptions as a grown Black woman.

The experiences and successes of Black girls and women who navigate the academic pipeline of education and society can be significantly impacted by the presence of mentors in their lives (Meadows-Fernandez, 2019). Mentors can inform mentees on how to rebel against oppressive behaviors and achieve freedom from oppressive behaviors. As Ladson-Billings (1995) eloquently pointed out, “Students must develop a border sociological consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (p. 162). When mentors can serve as “arbiters of culture,” it provides space to leverage mentoring that focuses on pedagogy of culture rather than simply achieving goals (Weiston-Serdan, 2017, p. 38). In recent years, scholars have observed how mentorships, relationships, and programs impact the societal norms and systemic challenges that folx who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color experience (BIPOC; Sánchez et al., 2021).

The data on mentoring programs indicated approximately 76% of mentees served are BIPOC children and adolescents (Sánchez et al., 2021).
Mentoring relationships are vital to the growth of Black girls and women to achieve academic success. Cooper (2018) addressed how Black girls and women react to “exclusion, unquestioned privilege, racial distortions, silence, ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and co-option” (BlackPast, 2012/1981, para 3). Mentorship serves as an opportunity to address the education system’s debt to Black women (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Exploring how customary mentorship practices that focus exclusively on the individuals in terms of engagement and cultural, political, and economic factors provide space for Black women to shape their experiences proactively and have room to dream as they navigate. Dillard (2022) contended that Black girls and women are not people of yesterday but people of today:

We are not a people of yesterday. Do they ask how many single seasons we have flowed from our beginnings till now? We shall point them to the proper beginnings of their counting…. The air everywhere is poisoned with the truncated tales of our origins. That is also part of the wreckage of our people. What has been cast abroad is not a thousandth of our history, even if the quality were truth…. But the haze of his foul world exists to wipe out knowledge of our way. (p. 1)

Research has suggested that Black girls and women learn their future voice by (re)examining their past voice through self-reflective writing and (re)membering their lived experiences. Dr. Cynthia Dillard (2022) contended that it is the (re)sponsibility of Black girls and women to (re)member and write about their lived experiences and to (re)flect on these experiences to share our stories and to invoke change in structurally oppressive educational institutions and society. Dillard argued that this becomes the spirit of our work to heal from our past and (re)envision our future as Black girls and women. Effective mentorship through re(writing) our stories creates the necessary space to (re)flect on that in the way Dillard (2022) contends we can have opportunity and space to do so.

As a Black girl and now a woman, it is critical for me to (re)collect my lived experiences through the process of self-reflection. Self-reflection can be done in the form of looking at past
journal entries, creating new journal entries, (re)viewing photographs, and examining blog posts on a social media platform. When Black girls and women are given the space to (re)visit their lived experiences to understand, they have free agency to analyze their own experiences with the intergenerational trauma created by systemic racism and take on the role of change agents to create change within their lived experiences. Self-reflection provides the opportunity for Black girls and women to (re)member and (re)call the memories, as well as access to inspect the mental dynamics that were present during the critical incidents they experienced in educational institutions and society (Cabillas, 2014). For there to be change, Black girls and women need a safe place where they can (re)member and (re)call their past experiences (Dillard, 2022).

Thus, in the context of Black feminist epistemology, self-reflection becomes critical support for Black girls and women in discerning the language that can liberate them “from mental, spiritual, and intellectual colonization of the very nature of how we know what we know as Black girls and women” (Dillard, 2022, p. 15). Black feminist thought decolonizes western epistemology by decentering white European ways of knowing and focusing on Black feminist ways of knowing. Therefore, it provides a space in which Black girls and women become the center of the conversation through self-(re)reflective processes of understanding (Dillard, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 1990).

The process of self-reflection delves into my lived experiences by tying together the critical incidents in which I received critical support with the systemic issues that were present in my life at the time I was figuring out how to navigate the school system, my family, and my community. I applied the theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Thought, Critical Mentorship, and Critical Autoethnography to my work to aid both educators and Black girls and women in gaining a greater understanding of how they may effectively
navigate through their lived experiences, both inside and outside of the classroom, as Black girls and women.

**Purpose Statement**

Cue Rob Base’s (1980) song “Joy and Pain”: “Hit it joy, pump pump pump it up and pain, sunshine come on come on sunshine, what else what else, and rain.” As I passed through tunnels of oppression, depression, and suppression in the education system and society, I experienced both joy and pain, sunshine and rain.

Drawing on Black Feminist Thought (BFT; Collins, 1989) and employing critical autoethnographic methods, the purpose of this study was to examine the critical incidents that sparked joy, pain, sunshine, and rain in my lived experiences and guided and shaped me as I navigated my educational life in and out of the academy. Through this critical autoethnography, I demonstrate how music, self-reflection, and mentoring not only helped me navigate the critical incidents that caused joy and pain, but also how these three elements were part of the critical support that helped me navigate the structural racism that exists within systems of education and society. To shed light on the lived experiences of Black girls and women, the following research question must be answered.

The overarching question was: *What were the critical incidents that guided me through the educational system as I transitioned from being a Black girl to becoming a Black woman?*

In addition, I addressed the following three sub-questions within my study.

- How did music help me navigate critical incidents that I experienced in the educational system?
- How did mentors/othermothers/otherparents help me navigate critical incidents that I experienced in the educational system?
How did self-reflective journaling help me navigate critical incidents that I experienced in the educational system?

In this dissertation, I discuss 10 critical incidents that occurred throughout my life and educational experiences and are connected to the hurdles I overcame and the support I received that aided in the development of the person I am today. In my dissertation, I dissect the struggles I endured while facing institutional racism: being pushed out, being labeled, being silenced, and needing help. Furthermore, I examine the critical support I received through memos, music, and mentors that helped shape who I am now. I investigate the dialectical relationships between the struggles I went through and the support I received that produced the mosaic of my life.

By analyzing my own story as part of a critical autoethnography, I offer educators, policymakers, and society effective tools to understand some of the potential elements of the lived experiences of Black girls and women in order to foster change in educational culture in a way that promotes equity for Black girls and women. Furthermore, this allows Black girls and women to find elements of themselves and their lived experiences within my story (Boylorn, 2016a). In addition, BFT gives educators, school administrators, and members of society the chance to ensure that Black girls and women are treated equitably. I present the critical incidents I encountered while exploring the critical supports that helped me navigate education and societal systems through the lenses of music, mentorship, and self-reflective journaling.

This study also has the potential to contribute to the academy by helping administrators, policymakers, mentors, and educators to introduce new techniques for examining curriculum and policies that influence Black girls’ and women’s performance and accomplishments in and outside of the classroom. In my review of the literature, I discovered that many of these false
narratives were (re)flective of my own experiences in the education system (Battle, 2021; Ricks, 2014), which were rooted in oppression and racism, both inside and outside the classroom.

Definitions

*Academic Institutions:* These are universities or other educational organizations that have been established or accredited by a statute or other governmental approval. Examples include, but are not limited to, San Diego State University (SDSU), the University of Phoenix, Weber State University, and K-12 individual schools. These institutions function within larger educational systems.

*Critical Incidents:* A critical incident may be defined as any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events that cause trauma within a school community and which overwhelm the normal coping mechanisms of that school (*Dealing with a Critical Incident*, Department of Education, 2020).

*Critical Mentoring:* Critical mentoring means that mentors act as opportunity brokers to help young people access resources and extend their networks in ways that will assist them in overcoming the often-daunting obstacles they face getting through school and into college and a career, helping them to focus on the means to transform their communities rather than abandon “them” (Weiston-Serdan & Sánchez, 2017, p. 41).

*Critical Supports:* These are areas that surrounded me, such as music, mentoring, and self-reflection, and assisted me in identifying and navigating through racist and gendered educational and societal lived experiences.

*Education Systems:* These systems govern and regulate individual institutions at the broadest level. Examples include the California State University system (also known as CSU), as well as the Utah Board of Regents and local school districts.
Mentors: These are individuals who committed themselves to me and guided me through the process of figuring out who I was and who I would develop into in the future. In addition, mentors are trusted individuals who make room for me to comprehend the critical incidents of my life and teach me how to maneuver through those moments.

Othermother(s): Othermother(s) is a vernacular term that refers to an older Black woman who functions as a mentor to younger Black girls and women and serves in many ways as a proxy mother to them by nurturing them through their lived experiences (Collins, 2000; James, 1993b).
This dissertation takes an intersectional approach. Through my own words, this autoethnographic study adds to the body of literature that illustrates why Black girls and women matter in and out of the classroom (Epstein et al., 2017). As a means of gaining an understanding of the experiences of Black girls and women, Critical Race Theory, Critical Mentorship, Black Feminist Theory, and Critical Autoethnography were used to examine the impact of mentorship in this study. Using these ideas and frameworks, I looked at how mentoring, in its broadest sense, helped me effectively traverse critical incidents in both my educational and societal experiences. Black girls and women have power and voice; Black girls’ and women’s representation matters, not just their “theoretical” interests (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 61). I call this intersectional
framework (see Figure 1) Black GIRL, Black GIRL, HOLLA because it indicates my process of drawing upon formal academic triaging in research methods while relying consciously and subconsciously using cultural intuition and prior childhood and adult socialization to explore my lived experiences. This is a process first detailed by Evans-Winters (2019).

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used to address how the intersectionality of class, race, sex, and national origin “plays out” when combined in various education systems for me as a Black girl (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT is used to explore how particular subgroups are illuminated within the social justice movement, particularly how Black girls’ and women’s issues and/or needs are often unaddressed in the classroom (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Black girls face oppression in school because of the two intersections of being Black and a woman in the academy (Ricks, 2014). Whiteness and dominant power control often prevent Black girls from receiving resources and meeting their needs in and out of the classroom (Annamma et al., 2016).

Framing this study with CRT helped me illuminate how I, as a Black girl and woman within the educational system, encountered experiences in hostile and racialized situations that left me feeling incompetent and incomplete. CRT suggests that race has critical implications that explain why Black women may acquiesce to silence in systems of education (Allen & Joseph, 2018). Scholars Evette Allen and Nicole Joseph (2018) used CRT to demonstrate how “race can affect the psychological well-being of Black graduate students who encounter racial microaggressions or other racial experiences while pursuing an education” (p. 4).

Another critical implication of CRT is the idea of the taxation of Black girls and women in academic institutions and society. Education and institutionalized societal systems create a
hegemonic, white patriarchal environment that is difficult for Black girls and women to navigate. As a direct consequence of this, Black women are (re)subjugated to a precarious existence as “others” in these environments.

When Black girls and women are “othered,” they are frequently burdened with the expectation that they should embody the mammy stereotype for the sake of those around them. This is done for the benefit of those who “other” them—which, in return, becomes a taxation of the mind, body, and spirit (Johnson, 2022). Because of these negative experiences, Black girls and women must create spaces to focus on their identity as Black, a girl, and a woman while balancing life in the academy (Allen & Joseph, 2018).

CRT facilitates the use of counternarratives as mechanisms for casting “doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 155). This exploration yields a (re)storying of the narratives assigned to me as a Black girl and woman throughout my educational journey. I counter popular rhetoric in the educational system and society with autoethnographic data from personal journals and selected music. That provided me with the opportunity to paint a more accurate vision of the educational system in America and its troublesome relationship with race, power, and politics as they pertain to Black girls and women (Crenshaw, 1991).

**Black Feminist Thought**

In 1989, Patricia Hill-Collins (1989) introduced Black Feminist Thought (BFT) with the understanding that BFT is grounded in the everyday struggles of Black women. BFT examines the perspective of Black women while assessing the ability of Black women to serve as champions for their needs and how to approach this from a political lens. Sojourner Truth became a political activist for her own needs and rights as a Black woman who endured
oppression within the systems of society (Huff, 2019). My experiences as a Black girl and woman navigating educational systems for the past 40 years have convinced me that BFT creates spaces for me to advocate for access to my basic human rights within the educational system.

Scholars Allen and Joseph (2018) argued the following in their recent work:

BFT is a political undertaking in which the personal experiences of Black women are moved into political conversations with the intent to shed light on their unique experiences. Thus, BFT advances CRT for this particular population in that the intersectional (race and gender) experiences of Black women are at the center. (p. 5)

BFT is used to help reframe the deficit lens for Black girls and women in the education pipeline. Black girls and women create spaces where their experiences empower each other through the four tenets of Black Feminist Theory: (a) defining self, (b) lived experiences, (c) the use of dialogue, and (d) personal accountability (cited by Watson, 2016, p. 245). Mentors can facilitate Black women achieving any of these four tenets through mentorship and love.

According to Collins (2000):

Black women’s intellectual work, I have come to see how it is possible to be both centered in one’s own experiences and engaged in coalitions with others. In this sense, Black feminist thought works on behalf of Black women, but does so in conjunction with other similar social justice projects. (p. xii)

BFT’s objective is to provide a platform to amplify voices of Black girls and women in society and is an analytical tool that can be applied to specific areas like education. In addition, BFT offers a safe environment for Black girls and women to discuss their experiences openly in the context of structural racism in education and society (Collins, 2000).

Regarding education and society, BFT grants permission for Black girls’ and women’s voices to take center stage in the discourse concerning oppression, family dynamics, work, and education. This discourse challenges the white feminist dominance of feminist theory while simultaneously nurturing the appreciation of Black girls’ and women’s voices within the
education system and society at large. For example, Evans-Winters (2018) described how research initially started with her inquiry into herself, which opened the door for her to reflect on her own life experiences. Therefore, she pushed her inquiry to the forefront of her research process by weaving participant stories into her own “observations, interpretations, and theoretical ponderings” (Evans-Winter, 2019, p. 18). This process pushes the limits of traditional research, which has limitations through frameworks of whiteness and the idea that research should only be objective.

Patterson et al.’s (2016) work showed that Black feminism tears down oppressive structures that hinder the progress of Black girls and women. Their research stated the following:

According to BFT scholars, Black women’s knowledge is acquired through our various experiences living, surviving, and thriving within multiple forms of oppression. It is a self-defined, embodied way of knowing. In other words, Black women’s subjective knowledge represents a standpoint epistemology. According to Collins, this is a way of being that “calls into question the content of what currently passes as truth and simultaneously challenges the process of arriving at that truth.” (p. 58)

The voice of the white perspective drowns out the voices of Black women’s efforts to make sense of their lived experiences, which do not always fit within the confines of the white viewpoint’s framing (Collins, 2000; Evans-Winters, 2019). According to Evans-Winters (2019), it is essential to take into consideration how Black women not only comprehend but also combat “contemporary social injustices,” such as “the imposition of deficit-thinking, white supremacy, and racialized gender bias in society as well as the research process itself” (p. 15). This research aimed to increase the visibility of Black girls and women in white-dominated intellectual spaces and society.

By including Patterson’s (2016) perspectives, it is possible to understand and gain additional knowledge about the many ways Black girls and women are mistreated in schools and society. Also, it helps administrators, teachers, and other members of society understand how
important the voices of Black girls and women are to put the history of their lives at the center of how we learn about and educate them. Furthermore, policymakers, administrators, and educators can learn the value of non-white perspectives on history and education.

Literature is scarce on Black girls’ and women’s lived experiences, particularly discussing the ways in which they (re)collect or (re)member these experiences (Dillard, 2022). BFT assisted me as the researcher and participant in exploring how I overcame the systems of oppression and racism I encountered. Creating spaces for Black girls and women like myself to (re)member these experiences and hold space to understand the structures of capitalistic, patriarchal, and anti-Black structures of dominance is an act of resistance, given how Black women experience these systems (Dillard, 2022). Dr. Cynthia Dillard (2022) considered that the use of the prefix “re” in “parentheses” before the word is an effective strategy to (re)mind all of us that “Black people have always inherently existed as bright holders of knowledge, culture, humanity, and creativity” (p. xv). I intend to use Dillard’s recommendations for this study because this framework provides a pathway for incorporating Black Feminism in qualitative inquiry to decolonize white methodological practices.

As a result, (re)member does not initiate or pioneer the (re)cognition of Blackness but rather reminds us of all that Black girls and women have always understood about themselves in the context of their consistent behavior. (Re)membering our lived experiences through the lens of Black feminism is a mosaic process for qualitative inquiry that bridges the gap between research, theory, and practice to investigate, interrupt, reveal, instigate, challenge, and explore the lack of support available to Black girls and women in educational systems and society (Evans-Winters, 2019).
Creating room for researchers and participants to engage in language to explore their lived experiences, dialogues, symbols, and metaphors in terms of conveying information and assessing their level of knowledge is part of this qualitative Black feminist research strategy (Collins, 2000; Dillard, 2022; Evans-Winters, 2019). When I can engage in research as Ashá Jones rather than as a detached researcher, I am better able to question white colonial methods of knowing by putting my Black lived experiences at the heart of the study (Evans-Winter, 2019).

**Critical Mentorship**

Dr. Bettina Love (2016) critiqued the conversation around how Black girls experience school and life. She explained, “Black girls are misunderstood, misread, a lot of their identities teachers do not understand or oftentimes know that they are the victims” (Education Week, 2016, n.p.). Therefore, for educators and administrators, there has to be a conversation about the issues impacting our most vulnerable—Black girls and women (Collins, 2000). Black girls and women who know who they are and what they carry can shift the deficit lens within systems of education and society through critical mentoring (Weiston-Serdan & Sánchez, 2017).

Dr. Torie Weiston-Serdan (2017) coined the term “critical mentoring.” Critical mentoring (CM) explores and embeds CRT into mentoring; the framework of the theory examines race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. CM weaves the themes into the mentoring relationships’ framework (Weiston-Serdan & Sánchez, 2017). This framework serves as a youth-centered framework for mentoring for mentors and youth. However, I believe the tenets of the framework closely align with the needs of Black girls and women throughout all systems of education and society.

Weiston-Serdan and Sánchez (2017) contended that critical mentoring is unlike other traditional forms of mentoring; she explored the idea of “augmented by a critical consciousness,
one that compels us to take action, one rooted in ancient tradition but remixed for new youth living in a new age” (p. 1). CM includes the ideas of CRT pedagogy to understand that critical mentoring is dedicated to developing mentoring relationships that support empowerment and culture for Black girls and women. CM encompasses the ideas of history, the dynamics of history, and the constructs of history. Research has indicated that critical mentoring interrupts systemic racism and oppression by making the connection to “embrac[ing] a dialectical view of knowledge that functions to unmask the connections between objective knowledge and the cultural norms, values, and standards of the society at large” (Darder, 2017, p. 10).

**Critical Autoethnography**

Critical autoethnography is a framework and method that draws on the author’s/ researcher’s lived experiences (Chang, 2009). Furthermore, it connects researcher insights to self-identity, cultural rules, resources, communication practices, premises, symbols, rules, shared meanings, emotions, and values, as well as larger social, cultural, and political challenges and issues (Adams et al., 2014; Brown-Vincent, 2019).

Critical autoethnography provides the ability to combine the strengths of academic research and first-person storytelling (Riddick, 2022). Through critical autoethnography, I analyzed self-narratives while creating a memoir. Understanding oneself could help educational complex and society understand Black girls’ and women’s experiences, which can help us bring about positive change. This relates to Tupac’s song described in the introductory section because it exhibits the ability to find a means to comprehend another person’s past experiences and the things that have occurred in their life. According to Adams et al. (2014):

> Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that: 1) uses a researcher’s personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences; 2) acknowledges and values a researcher’s relationships with others; 3) uses deep and careful self-reflection—typically referred to as “reflexivity”—to name and interrogate the
intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political; 4) Shows people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles; 5) balances intellectual and methodological rigor, emotion, and creativity; and 6) strives for social justice and to make life better. (p. 2)

As part of this study, I used critical autoethnography to help researchers, educators, policymakers, and other Black girls and women understand the critical incidents I experienced navigating educational systems from Black girlhood to Black womanhood. People who work in educational systems must understand my lived experiences to ensure that educational systems employ resources that not only help Black girls and women but also create spaces for knowledge, consciousness, and political empowerment so that the educational system will have culturally responsible leaders (Bermel, 2018; Reddick, 2019).

Summary of the Theoretical Framework

CRT provides the space to understand, and it addresses a deep, historical, and complex analysis of what drives ongoing racial inequality in educational and societal systems that Black girls and women navigate (Crenshaw, 1991, Lantz, 2021). Black Feminist Thought and Critical Mentoring complement each other, making them the “daughters” and “mentees” of the theoretical framework (Evans-Winters, 2019). Black Feminist Thought and Critical Mentoring were born out of CRT, making them the “daughters” and “mentees” of the theoretical framework (Evans-Winters, 2019). BFT and CM aided in understanding how I navigated the education system from Black girlhood to Black womanhood. Synthesizing the tenets of these four theoretical frameworks guided data collection, organization, and analysis. Cue the song, “What I need from you is understanding, so simple as 1-2-3. Understanding is what we need, you don’t even know me” (Dupri, 1993). In the research of Orbe and Boylorn (2020), critical autoethnography is an approach that allows for both personal and cultural critiques to gain a better understanding of one’s own lived experiences. This is exactly what the group Xscape was
trying to accomplish with their song “Understanding.” The group was encouraging the listener to explore the idea of someone getting to know who they were as a person because the other person had no idea who they were as a person. Black girls and women are often misunderstood within the constraints of academic intuitions and society, resulting in false narratives about who they are.

Through the convergence of these frameworks, I shed light on the patriarchal and racial injustices that Black women and girls have had to deal with, as well as the educational and social structures that have kept them in or expelled them from schools, workplaces, and society at large (Watson, 2016). As an example, the overlapping of these frameworks promotes the intellectual freedom of Blackness by enabling Black girls and women to recognize and examine their experiences as well as providing them with the tools to deal with racism and inequitable treatment in education systems and society to effect meaningful social change.

The theoretical framework frees up space for the essential and fundamental pillars of support—music, mentorship, and self-reflective journaling—that help Black girls understand their life stories, reimagine themselves, and consider their multiple identities and outside influences as they navigate the educational system and society (Greene, 2020).

**Literature Review**

In this section, I synthesized the relevant literature and, as the first objective, investigated what the research has said about the lived experiences of Black girls and women subjected to oppressive behaviors and structural racism within educational and societal systems. The second objective of the literature review was to gain an understanding of what researchers had to say about the conditions that exist within educational systems and which mentoring models are currently in a better position to help Black girls and women. In addition, the literature review
helped to unpack the ways in which Black women employ critical supports such as music, mentoring, and self-reflective writing when navigating academic institutions and society. The review of literature highlighted what is known about the system’s problems and what support is available (for example, mentoring, music, and journaling). The first section, “Help a Black Girl Out,” includes a review of the literature on the roles that other mothers and mentors contribute to the lives of Black girls and women. The second section, “Girl, what are you listening to?” shows how music serves as an expert witness for Black girls and women navigating educational systems. The third section, “Girl, you gotta write it down!” explains how Black girls and women can (re)collect and (re)calibrate memories through self-reflective writing. The fourth section summarizes what the literature says or does not say about how music, mentors, and self-reflective writing can support Black girls and women as they navigate educational systems.

This review will also make clear the gaps in the literature that led to my study. In addition, literature can assist school leaders and policymakers in creating policies that will help Black girls and women navigate systems of education while decolonizing systems of whiteness that are present in today’s dominant culture and continue to oppress Black girls and women—thereby empowering administrators, teachers, and educational systems to become culturally responsible leaders in schools and society as a whole. As Vine Deloria, Jr., (2018) suggested:

Every society needs educated people, but the primary responsibility of educated people is to bring the knowledge back into the community and make the knowledge available to others so that the lives they are leading make sense. (as cited in Khalifa, 2018, p. 39)

I used literature as a guide to find the holes in the research to understand how the three pillars of music, mentoring, and self-reflective writing in educational systems can impact the pathways for Black girls and women to succeed in systems of education and society (Terada, 2021). Thus far, research has indicated that incorporating these practices into educational
systems assists Black girls and women to develop professionally in educational settings and society (Dillard, 2002; Evans-Winters, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006). What is ultimately at stake here is the creation of mentorship pathways for Black girls and women in the education system and society that provide opportunities to foster positive experiences and decolonize systems of oppression.

**The Problem with the System**

When there is systematic oppression in educational systems, Black girls are denied the opportunity to excel because they are dehumanized in the classroom due to perpetuated false narratives. Black girls should be able to attend school and learn without being subjected to untrue stories about their backgrounds (MacPherson Institute, 2016). Administrators, teachers, and policymakers routinely expel Black female students from the educational system while simultaneously peddling false narratives about their abilities and potential (Fordham, 1993). Black girls are frequently stereotyped as loud, unruly, and problematic—requiring less support, being more knowledgeable about sex, and requiring less protection. Most of these stereotypes are untrue.

Racism is deeply entrenched throughout the educational system. People who have the power of authority within the educational system can make necessary changes to make the experience for Black girls more positive and productive (Bell, 2004). Leadership must construct strategies for implementing policies that will improve the experience of Black girls in the educational system.

As a historical example, President Abraham Lincoln’s decision on the Emancipation Proclamation shows how an opportunity to influence policy change that would discourage systems of racism, oppression, and discrimination against Black people was squandered. He
opted to protect the interests of white supremacist culture over the dignity of Black people because he believed it was right to do so. Lincoln’s intention to protect the union rather than basic rights is similar to what is still happening in 2023, when critical race theory is being pushed out and denied instruction in educational systems. This attitude, then, ignores the complexity of the systemic and the interlocking forces that Black girls and women face in educational and societal systems (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). In addition to this, this attitude empowers the continuation of microaggressions as well as inequitable and racist policies, both of which Black girls and women are forced to navigate (Johnson, 2022).

Lincoln made it abundantly clear that the interests of white supremacy were more important than the human rights of African Americans. “I do what I do in regards to slavery and the colored race because I believe it will aid in the preservation of the union” (Bell, 2004, p. 53). There are two areas of concern we have to reconcile from President Lincoln’s decision on the policy of enslaved Africans. First, these enslaved Africans were seen as Black first, not as humans. Second, the Black folks’ lives were of no interest to President Lincoln or federal policymakers because their interests did not converge with freedom. Bell (2004) argued that liberation for Blacks meant a loss of funding for the white supremacist culture of society.

As I understand the historical context of decision making with regard to Black girls and women in 1865, we see how structural racism and oppression navigated policies that are still restricting the lives of Black girls and women in the education system and society. For Black girls and women, racist social policies have created irreconcilable social conditions in which Black girls and women cannot understand their lived experiences to move forward and achieve success in and out of the classroom. For Black girls and women, their actions today are such that they feel a vital need to acquiesce in society through forced silence as a direct result of the
intergenerational hierarchies that have produced racial inequities in the classroom and society. These inequities manifest themselves in the form of increased suspension rates in the classroom, lack of attention from teachers, demotions within the workplace, physical and mental health issues, and low self-esteem—all of which are consequences rooted in the “interlocking systems of race, class, and gender oppression” that Black women have to confront as the triple jeopardy of life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Morris & Perry, 2017). Furthermore, as a Black girl who is now a woman, I am still trying to understand the hierarchies of racism to reconcile my past experiences with structural racism to create change for myself and other Black girls and women in systems of education.

The historic 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision stipulated that for Black people to achieve civil rights victories, white and Black interests had to converge (Bell, 2004). “Few in the country, Black or white, understood in 1954 that racial segregation was merely a symptom, not the disease; that the real sickness is that our society in all of its manifestations is geared to the maintenance of white superiority” (p. 96). We have to kill the disease of racism in the classroom by removing barriers of criminalization, discrimination, oppression, and racism for Black girls and women.

It is important to look at past historical events to understand how past decisions have impacted Black girls and women. The Supreme Court in Plessy v. Ferguson was intended to pave the way for “separate but equal,” and Black people had high hopes that the 14th Amendment would provide them with some form of legal protection (Bell, 2004). However, this is not what happened; instead, it created more systemic inequalities for Black girls and women. In 2022, it is still critical in terms of how Black girls and women experience inequality in the
education systems and society to have a solid understanding of the framework and how this decision was made.

The objectives of these policies were not to discriminate against or isolate Black educators; rather, they were designed to pave the way for their demotion or termination. When this is done, it leads to a decrease in the number of Black girls and women who are in the classroom as teachers and mentors. Black girls and women have been perceived as inferior to white people (Duncan-Shippy, 2019).

In 2014, the National Women’s Law Center and the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund produced a study that included specifics on how frequently Black girls were disciplined in school and why they were punished. According to the research, “African-American girls frequently experience deeply embedded prejudices that reinforce racial and gender biases in the classroom” (Smith-Evans et al., 2014). These practices lead to higher discipline and suspension rates for Black girls. For example, “twelve percent of all female African-American prekindergarten through grade twelve pupils were suspended” during the 2011-2012 school year (Hing, 2014, para 2). This was a six-fold increase in suspensions, compared to suspensions for white females. It was greater than the average for all females in general and more than the average for white, Asian, and Latino boys who were suspended (Evans, 2016). These types of pushouts are white-centered and harm the success rates of Black girls who ultimately become Black women (Morris & Perry, 2017). The result is that no current positive policies have been put in place for Black girls and women in the education system; rather, they are detrimental in the way that they criminalize Black girls. There is an ongoing history of decision making in America that gives privileges to the dominant culture while harming Black girls and women in the education pipeline (Morris & Perry, 2017).
Administrators, educators, and legislators must develop policies that promote the success of Black girls and women in the pipeline (Ricks, 2014).

**Help a Black girl out, playa!**

We can learn several things from Black girls who “make it” through the educational pipeline. The first is that Black girls need and are looking for support and understanding (Love, 2012; Morris & Harris, 2016). Black girls are looking for support systems because they have endured so many different discriminatory circumstances in and out of the classroom (Fordham, 1993). Instead of viewing Black girls as “disruptive,” administrators and educators need to understand their cries in the classroom in order to change the system (Morris, 2018).

To illustrate, Dr. Robin Boylorn (2023) explained that autoethnography creates a brave space for individuals to tell their stories while also providing an opportunity for scholarship to circumvent being sanitized (personal communication, February 2, 2023). Boylorn explained that autoethnography served as her public diary, which enabled her to keep her story private until she felt ready to share it with others, while covertly she constructed a setting in which she not only understood her own personal trauma but could also begin to heal from it (personal communication, February 2, 2023).

Dr. Bettina Love (2012) elaborated further on the notion that autoethnography is a way for her to repay her debt through context. She explained that through playing basketball, she was able to gain a better understanding of her own dysfunctional family as well as how to navigate the streets of the inner city. Love was aware that basketball served as both a guide and a narrative for her as she navigated the complex educational system. Love indicated that autoethnography was a way for her to find the answers to the questions she had been looking
for all along (Love, 2012). In addition, she explored in *Hip Hop’s Li’l Sistas Speak*—through autobiography, informed interviews, and observations conducted with six Black middle and high school girls—how young Black girls navigated the space of hip hop music and culture to form ideas concerning racism, pushout, being silenced, body, race, identity, inequality, and privilege, while simultaneously understanding her own story from their perspective. This was done while simultaneously understanding her own story from their perspective (B. Love, personal communication, March 23, 2023).

My dissertation project makes a contribution to the existing body of research on the experiences of Black girls and women within educational systems. I did this by developing an original framework of the personal mosaic to gain a deeper understanding of the processes by which Black girls and women overcome institutional barriers in order to become their genuine selves and realize their full potential in this life. The research of these Black women scholars extends, contributes to, and adds to the existing body of work by virtue of the fact that they made explicit use of the reality that they were scholars.

The utilization of the research that was completed by Black women decolonizes the practices of white research methodologies, pushes the boundaries of what is considered possible, and alters the manner in which research is conducted out (Patel, 2016). Furthermore, it provides the opportunity to build on the previous literature that already exists and to have profound impacts on the field in order to assist Black girls and women with the objective of navigating the institutionalized systems of education and society. These impacts are intended to help Black girls and women achieve success in today’s society. My particular research topic is unique because, although some research is already available, it is limited in the field that combines music,
memos, and mentoring as a totality for how to assist Black girls and women in navigating the institutionalized systems of education and society.

Mentorship provides trusted mentors with an opportunity to pour knowledge and success into Black girls’ minds and build their self-esteem (Morris & Perry, 2017). Moreover, mentors can provide Black girls and women with the discipline and mentorship they need (Roses & Randolph, 1987). These mentors can teach Black girls the cultural capital they carry in education systems and in society (Yosso, 2020). When Black girls know who they are and what they have, Black girls’ and women’s lives improve in the education system (Yosso, 2020, p. 70).

Connections can be built with mentors who provide support to them outside the classroom to support Black girls in the school system and improve building relationships (Everett et al., 2016).

Stanlie James (1993b) developed the phrase “other mother,” which she described as “those who help blood mothers in the obligations of child care for short- to long-term periods, in informal or formal arrangements” (Busia & James, 1993b). Patricia Collins (2005) supported that other mothers are women accountable for the sustainability of the family structure through caring, ethics, education, and community service. Other mothers can be inclusive of sisters, aunts, neighbors, grandparents, or community members who step in to help Black girls and women navigate their identities as Black girls and women. Collins also said that bonds may grow and develop between Black mothers and Black girls and women who essentially become their students in education systems and society (Collins, 2005).

Othermothers/other parent figures can disrupt the narrative many Black females have internalized from their experiences in education systems and society. Othermothers or parent figures give Black girls access to their elders’ wisdom, experience, and survival skills (Ricks,
Othermothers and other parent figures contribute to the conceptualization of the educational and lived experiences, environment, and understanding of how relationships function within the context of mentorship that Black girls and women experience. Building on the nature of these familial relationships in Black culture, othermothers and other parent figures encourage Black girls and women to engage in cultural traditions of shared mothering or fathering responsibilities, with an emphasis on the collective well-being of the Black girls and women (Dixson & Dingus, 2008).

According to findings from research conducted by Black feminists Dixson and Dingus (2008), many Black girls and women have devised methods to fight back against the oppressive conditions in which they are forced to learn and work while finding ways to cope with the conditions. The practice of othermothering is a good illustration in this regard. James (1993b) provided the following description of an othermother,

They can be, but are not confined to, such blood relatives as grandmothers, sisters, aunts, cousins, or supportive fictive kin. They not only serve to relieve some of the stress that can develop in the intimate daily relationships of mothers and daughters but they can also provide multiple role models for children. This concept of othermothering which has its roots in the traditional African world-view and can be traced through the institution of slavery, developed in response to an ever-growing need to share the responsibility for child nurturance. (p. 45)

When it comes to assisting Black girls and women in understanding who and what they are within the context of the educational system and society, other mothers and other parental figures step in to fill in the gap. Furthermore, other mothers and other parental figures aid Black girls and women in finding success within education systems and society. There is limited research in the existing body of literature that demonstrates how other mothers can make a difference in the systemic racism that Black girls and women are subjected to in educational systems and society.
**Girl, what you listening to?**

Music serves as an “expert witness” and mentor in the lives of Black girls and plays a critical role in understanding their stories (Love, 2012; B. Love, personal communication, March 23, 2023). Hip hop echoes how impactful lyrics, music, and culture shape the lives of Black girls. The lyrics, the beat, and the artist become the Black girls’ teachers, mentors, and administrators as they learn how to deconstruct racism, negative relationships, family concerns, and the inequalities they face in the classroom (Love, 2012).

Black girls and women can use music to (re)cognize that they are strong, independent, and (re)silient while dealing with stressors like racism, sexism, bullying, and a stressful home life by providing them space to create meaning as part of their racial identities while navigating environmental stressors. Healing and therapy can be achieved through the use of music as a defense mechanism against the negative effects of social and environmental stressors. A portion of the history that Black girls and women learn about themselves is deficit-based; therefore, it is necessary for them to create and (re)author their own personal and communal stories as a form of resistance that will give their stories a permanent place in the here and now as well as in the future (Payne, 2022).

Music gives Black girls and women a space in which they can analyze and build ideas about their blackness, gender identity, and the community through their lived experiences, while making room for the development of racial and gender identities simultaneously. The educational complex in particular sends contradictory messages about femininity and sexuality to Black girls and women, who are pushed between popular culture ideologies about their Black girlhood and womanhood (Barrett, 2011; Payne, 2022).
My love for music has helped me become more aware that I am a music lyric every day of my life. Music has been a way to express myself for as long as I can remember, and it is still one of the first acts I do when trying to make sense of something that has happened in my life. This is one of the most vulnerable acts I have had to do in life: share my rain and pain to create a space for sunshine and rain for someone behind me to heal and move forward (Freire, 2018).

The literature suggests that Black girls having space where they are “promoted and protected” as Black girls (Khalifa, 2018) contributes to dismantling exclusionary practices that affect their learning process. Keys to success in the education pipeline for Black girls include exploring disengagement and their emotional and academic needs. An examination of the ways in which music and education might work together to assist Black girls and women in achieving success is limited in the research literature.

For example, while listening to music is generally thought of as solely an auditory experience, music enables a more holistic sensory experience that can involve experiencing the vibrations of the music as well as reading and analyzing the lyrics (Wallace et al., 2020). The listener experiences a range of feelings in response to the music. In addition, music allows Black girls and women to have a space where they may acknowledge the different ways in which they might comprehend their identities and articulate how they make sense of their lived experiences through the music.

Music gives space for Black girls to understand who they are through the lens of music by learning the meaning of the lyrics, which in turn assists with the development of how they learn in the classroom (Love, 2014). An examination of the ways in which music and education might work together to assist Black girls and women in achieving academic success is still lacking from the research literature.
Self-reflective journaling and memory (re)collection provided the opportunity to create a platform to acquire insights into how I experienced my critical incidents and how my critical support systems helped me navigate society as a Black girl and now as a Black woman (Dillard, 2002). Individually and culturally formed narrative representations do not precede memory; instead, memory precedes narrative representations as to the outcome of “carrying out” the subject’s autoethnographic voice through memory narratives, also known as journaling and (re)reflective writing (Brockmeier, 2009).

Writing about oneself in a self-reflective manner can help Black women and girls openly share their voices, identities, and points of view pertaining to issues of racism, discrimination, and political systems that demonstrate the influence of political and social pressure in educational systems and society (Muhammad, 2015). Furthermore, research has shown that journaling can serve as an essential resource for Black girls and women as they navigate the educational and societal systems that they are confronted with (Bronwell, 2020). For instance, Price-Dennis et al. (2017) defined Black girl literacies as “specific acts in which Black girls read, write, speak, move, and create in order to affirm themselves, the(ir) world, and the multi-dimensionality of young Black womanhood and/or Black girl-hood” (p. 5). Furthermore, self-reflective writing can provide an opportunity for Black girls and women to identify ways in which they can contextually understand their lived experiences, while also aiding them in developing critical understandings of the world to arm themselves against it (Kelly, 2020). Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz (2016) argued that there needs to be a call for researchers to understand the impact of educational inequality on Black girls and to “create strategies and actions to interrupt them” (p. 294); in other words, providing space for Black girls and women to write about their experiences.
lived experiences creates this interruption and offers a space for freedom through their writing (McArthur & Muhammad, 2020).

One of the main goals of my journal readings is to shed light on the most important things that happened to me so that I can understand the most important things that helped me do well in school and society. Second, through my reflective writing in my journals, I intend to show how my encounters with racism, discrimination, and power structures demonstrate the influence of political and social pressures that exist within educational systems and society, while demonstrating that journaling is a critical support for Black girls and women as they navigate educational and societal systems (Bronwell, 2020).

Black girls and women understand the importance of being seen, heard, and valued rather than being bullied and facing white-privileged systems. Black girls and women are “othered” in educational systems and society by people who do not understand their cultural and ideological perspectives, and there is constant policing in systems ingrained with white supremacist, capitalist, and racist ideologies (Johnson-Bailey, 2002).

Self-(re)reflective journaling creates an opportunity for Black girls and women to mediate through writing on their understanding of the critical incidents they experience, the essence of which leads to self-actualization through writing provides psychological freedom to cultivate healing while Black girls and women mentally (re)energize and (re)cognize avenues of critical support (Smith et al., 2021). There is limited research that takes into account the ways in which engaging in self-reflective writing might help Black girls and women achieve success both inside and outside of the classroom.
Summary of Literature Review

My research aimed to combat societal issues such as racism, gender prejudice, and false narratives that hurt Black girls and women in educational institutions. The data can be used by mentors, educators, and administrators who are working with Black girls and women to create healthy environments for them. This literature review revealed a lack of research that shows how music, self-reflective journaling, and “other mothers” as mentors play roles in the success of Black girls and women. Therefore, this research study is very important to the field of education.
Chapter 3

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the research design for this critical autoethnographic study. Specifically, through the lens of Black feminism, I described my qualitative inquiry to better understand the critical incidents that I, as a Black girl and woman, face while also recognizing the critical support of otherparenting/mentoring, music, and reflective self-journaling that I have experienced (Collins, 2000).

My onto-epistemology, which is Black, African-centered, and womanist, functions as research related to the sociopolitical conditions I experienced as a Black girl and woman. As a participant in the research, I was exposed to the everyday infrastructure of structural and systemic racism that exists within educational systems and throughout society. In this chapter, I drew on my use of this approach to help readers better understand my lived experiences as a Black girl who has now become a Black woman, who was a mentee and is now transformed into a mentor. As I reflect on my journey, I know it is important for me to amplify my story to challenge the many times the institutionalized racist structures embedded within educational systems and society at large have tried to erase or disenfranchise me as a Black woman with multiple and complex identities. As the researcher and participant, I intended to use the protocol and add my own reflections.

My research as an autoethnographer allows me, a Black woman, to (re)member, (re)collect, re(imagine), and (re)focus on who I am and my lived experiences. In 2013, I heard this quote, “If I choose to be an infinite person, which I choose to be, I must teach people beyond me.” I will always be Black, but I won’t always be broken, and neither will the Black girls and
women who come behind me. My story, composed with the personal artifact in this research, changes another Black girl or woman’s narrative (Orbe & Boylorn, 2020).

**Research Design**

Together, autoethnographic research methods and Black feminism in qualitative inquiry provide the opportunity to be creative and center as both the researcher and a participant. Because both of these theories center on the participant and the researcher, they aid in decolonizing white academic research by allowing me, a Black girl who is now a Black woman, as the researcher and participant, to discuss the critical incidents that happened to me and explain the critical supports that assisted me in maneuvering systems of education and society that were impacted by structural racism (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). By (re)centering academic research on myself as the subject of inquiry, it decolonizes white academic research and creates room for decentering white academic experiences (Dillard, 2022). Education has traditionally been centered on the advancement of white knowledge; by exposing my lived experiences as a Black girl and Black woman, I object to the colonial epistemologies that have dominated education systems and society. This (re)centering challenges these epistemologies into question, amplifying the voices of Black girls and women who have been colonized in the past (Dillard, 2022). This, in turn, weakens the political and institutional influence of those who have historically been colonizers.

In scholarship and rigorous research, white researchers have historically served as the model for just how research is conducted and as the “gold” standard for how to investigate or validate research claims (Patel, 2016). It is critical to decolonize dominant white positionalities that monopolize academic research methodologies, particularly when it comes to analyzing lived
experiences as well as research about and by Black girls and women. Patel (2016) contended that if research focuses solely on strata without addressing the societal design that creates these strata, it prevents the exploration of analyzing the real context of scholarship and rigorous research, both of which play a role in contributing to the creation of change in systems in which institutionalized racism affects Black girls and women. Patel’s argument was based on the fact that when research only looks at strata, it prevents the exploration of the real context of research.

It is important to highlight and recognize the mechanisms that keep racism and oppression alive within educational systems in order to bring about changes in educational systems for Black girls and women. Black girls and women continue to face institutionalized racism, even in 2022, within systems of education and society. They are denied an equitable education, which limits their chances for success. In my research, I contend that these systems are responsible for keeping racism and oppression alive. This research design addressed institutionalized racism by using my personal experiences to illuminate and hold a mirror to the United States so that it realizes the damage it has done to Black girls and women within educational systems and society.

The white-dominant systems created and upheld by the oppressive structures that Black women and girls have had to suffer may be broken through the use of qualitative inquiry via the perspective of Black feminism (Evans-Winters, 2019). Brown-Vincent (2019) elaborated on the ways in which qualitative inquiry through autoethnography is empowered through Black feminist work. According to Brown-Vincent, ultimately, when properly deployed, autoethnography is the Black feminist work of documenting our narratives, the intersectional work of interrogating and examining the global nature of our oppression and our liberatory
struggles. The most critical contribution of Black Feminist Autoethnography is that of presenting oppositional knowledge, which demonstrates the ways in which our individual preoccupations are linked by histories of struggle as well as our liberation. Furthermore, the work of Black Feminist Autoethnographers is to document that which we always, already know to be true—that our fates are linked, and the struggle continues (p. 124).

This critical autoethnography aims to help other researchers, educators, policymakers, and Black girls and women understand my critical incidents and navigation through education systems and society from Black girlhood to Black womanhood. The goal of this research is to impact education systems and society as well as create culturally responsible leaders (Collins, 2018; Khalifa, 2018).

**Black Feminism in Qualitative Inquiry**

The “tenets and methodology of Black feminism and womanism in connection to qualitative research methods and analysis,” as defined by Dr. Evans-Winters (2019), are analyzed in relation to qualitative research methodologies. She explained that Black feminism can make use of these tenets to “expose and trouble marginalization and exclusionary practices through qualitative inquiry” (p. 15). The formation of Black feminist consciousness is dependent on the incorporation of the following five tenets: “(a) musings about knowledge and knowing; (b) how one interacts with participants throughout the research process; (c) one’s understanding of the context where the study takes place; (d) the body of literature reviews; and (e) interpretation and analysis of data” (p. 15).

According to Evans-Winter (2019), the first three tenets above are designed to aid researchers in describing epistemology and their approach as they relate to research. In contrast,
the last two tenets are designed to characterize the stages of the process of doing qualitative research. By combining the five tenets, I can connect my critical incidents, also known as lived experiences, to music, mentorship, and self-reflective writing. Black feminist theory in qualitative review allows me as the researcher and the participant to review simultaneously the literature and engage with data analysis, collection, and interpretation. Autoethnographic research methods and Black feminism in qualitative inquiry provide the opportunity for Black girls and women to be heard.

**Data Collection**

Taking a critical autoethnographic approach from a Black feminist lens, I built an archive representing critical incidents in my navigation of education systems and academic institutions. Data sources included a bank of music, past and present self-reflective journals, and interviews with other parents/othermothers/mentors.

*Music*

Data collection included music and lyrics to illustrate each critical incident. These songs were drawn from a bank of 80 songs that I have collected in my playlists since middle school. The playlist bank consists of songs connected to the theoretical framework and to which I have a personal connection. The genres of music consist of hip-hop, rap, R&B, and gospel music because those are the genres to which I regularly listen. Rather than just collecting music from a specific era, the songs were chosen because I believe this music had connection to my framework and critical incidents (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I listened to a total of 83 hours of music on Apple music, YouTube, and Spotify.
Memos

I used my handwritten journal entries from middle school until the present day and social media posts/blogs to connect my critical incidents to the context within the theoretical framework, as these artifacts demonstrate how I was able to navigate education systems and society to open up space that investigates the experiences of Black girls and women that help them grow rather than exploit them. In Chapter 4, I include excerpts from my journal entries and other writings from my artifacts. The excerpts were maintained in their original form to preserve their authenticity, which includes spelling and grammar. I implemented both reflective journaling and reflexive journaling as part of my study. Memos consisted of childhood journals as well as more current reflexive writing. The majority of my middle and high school journals were reconstructed from handwritten entries during ED 808 Publishing in Education, a joint Ph.D. program course. My original plan was to use the memos to write a journal article. Due to the theft of the original journals, typed versions were used for this analysis. When I use reflective journaling, I focus on the memories of the different aspects of the critical incidents of my life as I navigated through the education system and society. I wrote a journal before each interview as a way to (re)flect on my thoughts, interpretations, and conclusions about lived experiences. Furthermore, reflexive journaling provides space to center me within the research process to better understand my thoughts, perceptions, or attitudes toward my lived experiences (Dillard, 2022; Evans-Winters, 2019).

These past artifacts of journaling, social media blogs, music lyrics, photographs, and so on are all parts of personal memory data collection (Esterberg, 2002; Hughes & Pennington, 2017). As I (re)read and (re)typed my journal entries, it provided me space for me to understand
the totality of my lived experiences and the truth of my complex (re)lationships with my family members, highlighting my love for my grandmother while understanding what she did to me was wrong. Furthermore, this helped me to be (re)flexive in my thoughts and interactions with my grandmother because my interactions do not (re)present the full complexity of my grandmother’s identity. The memos forced me in some ways to put myself in my grandmother’s shoes because I do not know what she experienced in her journey from Black girlhood to Black womanhood. Furthermore, it provided me the space to be empathic towards my grandmother and not to demonize her humanity, and it allowed me to characterize her in her own humanity and talk about this truth of my complex relationship. My interactions with my grandmother do not represent the full complex of her identity (R. Boylorn, personal communication, February 2, 2023).

**Othermother/Otherparent/Mentor Interviews**

In addition to the archive of personal data (i.e., music, journals), I interviewed nine individuals I have identified as othermothers, other parent figures, or mentors to me throughout the critical incidents I encountered while navigating the education system and society. The ability to use my voice efficiently is one of the most valuable skills I have gained, thanks to the guidance of my othermothers/other parental figures. These individuals are my othermothers and several other parental figures referred to as mentors in the academy. They helped me develop a deeper understanding of my past and current self in the process. After having all my trust broken within my biological family structure, I sought the guidance of my mentors with the hope that they would help me rebuild it. They taught me how to love at a time when I did not think I could do so anymore, and I will be forever grateful.
Interviews were an essential way for me to construct knowledge through social interchange with up to 11 mentors I have encountered throughout my life and the last 32 years of my academic life (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I selected the mentors that I interviewed because they were instrumental in assisting me in processing the effects of the critical incidents to which I was subjected, such as racism; being labeled as angry, unruly, and a failure by the education system; being pushed out; and understanding my racial identity. All mentors identified as Black.

After selecting the participants, I contacted them to collect a signed consent form to participate in the research study (Bhattacharya, 2017). I contacted participants to arrange or establish dates for interviews after they completed the consent forms (see Appendix B). Once the interview dates were set, I conducted one semi-structured, in-depth interview with each participant in my research study (see Appendix A) (Bhattacharya, 2017). I conducted interviews using the Zoom platform because my mentors were in many different locations. Interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. Zoom interviews were recorded to transcribe the discourse and record the interviewees’ responses. Zoom did the preliminary transcription of the interviews, and I followed up by listening to the recordings and making any corrections.

I interviewed mentors through the lens of critical race theory and qualitative methods using a semi-structured (Bhattacharya, 2017) approach. The interviews were meant to probe and pry away the surface-level knowledge of my mentoring experiences to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of my own mentorship experiences. These interviews were transcribed and reviewed for accuracy (McLellan et al., 2003). Table 1 presents the participants’ demographic data.
Table 1

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym Names</th>
<th>Gender/Race</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Critical Incident(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Shabazz</td>
<td>Female/Black</td>
<td>Community member</td>
<td>3, 7, 8,9 Ashá’s Lyrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Harrold aka Dr. H</td>
<td>Male/Black</td>
<td>College administrator</td>
<td>7, 8, 9, Ashá’s Lyrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Macarthy Adams</td>
<td>Female/Black</td>
<td>Keynote speaker</td>
<td>10, Ashá’s Lyrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Ben X.</td>
<td>Male/Black</td>
<td>College administrator</td>
<td>Ashá’s Lyrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. bell hook davis</td>
<td>Female/Black</td>
<td>College administrator</td>
<td>Ashá’s Lyrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop Truth</td>
<td>Male/Black</td>
<td>Pastor</td>
<td>Ashá’s Lyrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Faith</td>
<td>Female/Black</td>
<td>Sorority sister</td>
<td>Ashá’s Lyrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brionne</td>
<td>Female/Black</td>
<td>Christian mentor</td>
<td>Ashá’s Lyrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Ethel Cuff Black</td>
<td>Female/Black</td>
<td>College administrator</td>
<td>Ashá’s Lyrics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

As part of processing the memory reflections, I performed memory writing to decolonize the traditional data collection methods by creating rich, thick descriptions of my critical incidents to enrich the study. I did this by centering my critical incidents as a Black girl and woman to challenge the normative, white-centered perspectives of research by analyzing my lived experiences as a Black girl and woman whose experiences are often devalued through colonized methodologies (Dillard, 2022; Winters-Evans, 2019).

I identified 10 critical incidents as unexpected events or sequences of events that caused significant trauma, where I was overwhelmed and could not navigate using immediate and personal coping mechanisms. I examined the pivotal life-changing moments that altered how I viewed and navigated my world. These critical incidents are rooted in racism, pushout, anger,
labeling, and needing help. In addition, these are memories I struggled with and am continually working to overcome. Boylorn (2021) explained this as “walking wounded.” She explained that to walk wounded is to recognize that the physical and psychic “lifeblood” draining us is “the manifestation of gendered racism” (p. 22).

To identify these critical incidents, I (re)read all of my journal entries, (re)listened to my music, and (re)watched and (re)read the interview transcripts. Ten specific incidents were identified and analyzed, from middle school to current, initiating the analysis process. I looked for critical incidents of racism, being pushed out, being labeled, anger, the need for assistance, development, self-actualization, positive relationships, and racial identity with a focus on the following phases of life in the academic system: high school, undergraduate, graduate school, doctoral student, and academic workplace.

The initial coding process was facilitated manually to identify the emerging themes as the data were collated. Once the data were coded and collated, I entered them into an Excel spreadsheet to determine the coherent patterns that formed a thematic match to the conceptual framework (Saldaña, 2015). The efficacy of each theme in relation to the data set was continually reviewed to determine if it fit within the thematic map and represented the data set as a whole.

Table 2 highlights the data collection and analysis procedures and ensures that each critical incident includes a thick description (Geertz, 2017) and represents the multiple phases of my life.

Table 3 presents the procedures I used for data analysis while exploring how critical support assisted me as I navigated the education system and society. As part of Black feminism in qualitative inquiry, this analytic approach provided me the creative space as a researcher to
(re)examine my self-reflective writing experiences, mentoring experiences, music, photographs, and interview transcripts by taking notes of the statements that were significant to and resonated with me (Dillard, 2022; Evans-Winters, 2019).

Research Methods and Interpretation

Table 2

Chronological Timeline of Data Sources and Corresponding Critical Incidents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Critical Incidents</th>
<th>Critical Incident and Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| April 9, 1990 | 8th Grade Journal Entry *You don’t know me, T.I. | • My first recorded experience of structural oppression in the classroom and poverty within society  
• My first recorded experience of being misunderstood at school | Critical Incident #1: These Cats Think They Know Me |
| May 15, 1990  | 8th Grade Journal Entry *So Many Tears, Tupac | • My first recorded experience of dealing with rejection from family.  
• My recorded experiences of understanding my dysfunctional family dynamics.  
• My recorded experience of understanding the war on drugs in society in my home. | Critical Incident #2: My Tears Will Pay Off |
| June 25, 1991 | 9th Grade Journal Entry *What About Your friends, TLC | • My first recorded experience of informal mentoring.  
• My first time understanding Black woman who wanted to pour into my life outside of my family in a positive way.  
• My first time hearing I could go to college from a Black woman | Critical Incident #3: You Have a Friend Indeed Girl |
| April 10, 1993 | 10th grade Journal Entry *How to Survive in South Central, Ice Cube | • My recorded experiences of understanding the loss of childhood innocence.  
• My recorded experience of watching my grandma getting arrested.  
• My recorded experiences of understanding the war on drugs. | Critical Incident #4: Even the Strong Figure Out How to Survive |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Grade/Year of College</th>
<th>Journal/Entry</th>
<th>Critical Incident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 13, 1995</td>
<td>12th Grade</td>
<td>12th Grade Journal Entry *If These Walls Could Talk, Tracy Chapman</td>
<td>Critical Incident #5: The Walls Are Closing in On Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My recorded experiences of understanding prostitution.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My recorded experience of violent attacks from my family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My record experience of understand assimilation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My record experience of showing tears of pain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 28, 1995</td>
<td>Freshman year of college</td>
<td>Freshman year of college Journal Entry *Me Against the World, Tupac</td>
<td>Critical Incident #6: Ashá in Her Own World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My recorded experience of finally be away from 1488 Douglas Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My recorded experience of still believing I had to be a soldier by fighting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My first recorded experience of discrimination in college</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 8, 1996</td>
<td>Sophomore year of college</td>
<td>Sophomore year of college Journal Entry *If I Ruled the World, Nas</td>
<td>Critical Incident #7: The Rules of This World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My first recorded experience of dealing with structural racism on a college campus and legal systems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My first memory of mentorship from a Black male in a professional role on a college campus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2, 1996</td>
<td>Sophomore year of College</td>
<td>Sophomore year of College Journal Entry Music 8 *Can’t Nobody Hold Me Down, Mase and Sean “Puffy” Combs</td>
<td>Critical Incident #8: Playa You Can’t Hold Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My first record experience of understanding a sense of belonging through wanting to join a Black sorority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My recorded experience of understanding the difference between a Black sorority and a white sorority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 6, 1996</td>
<td>Sophomore year of College</td>
<td>Sophomore year of College Journal Entry Music Can’t Nobody Hold Me Down, Mase and Sean “Puffy” Combs</td>
<td>Critical Incident #9: Somebody Is Really Watching Over Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My first recorded experience with the death of my second grandfather</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My recorded experience of the toxic relationship that I had with my grandfather</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My recorded experience learning that my grandmother was diagnosed with dementia.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Critical Incident #9: Somebody Is Really Watching Over Me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 3, 1997</td>
<td>Sophomore year of college Journal entry</td>
<td>My recorded experience of me joining a Black sorority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Can’t Nobody Hold Me Down, Mase and Sean “Puffy” Combs</td>
<td>My recorded experience of getting to leave the state to meet sorority sisters in Arizona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My first recorded experience that I had the ability to become a mentor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 12, 1997</td>
<td>Sophomore of college Journal entry</td>
<td>My first recorded experience dealing with a friend and peer mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Can’t Nobody Hold Me Down, Mase and Sean “Puffy” Combs</td>
<td>My recorded experience that my aunt was in jail for a drug violation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My recorded experience that my family dynamics would change again with my grandmother’s health declining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 11, 1997</td>
<td>Sophomore year of college Journal entry</td>
<td>My first recorded experience of going to the legal system to become a guardian for my 9-year-old brother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 12, 1997</td>
<td>Sophomore of college Journal entry</td>
<td>My recorded experience of navigating child protective services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Can’t Nobody Hold Me Down, Mase and Sean “Puffy” Combs</td>
<td>My recorded experience of Dr. H’s continued support of me from a holistic perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My first experiences of understanding mentorship through friendship as the boys on the football team and my friend Justice began to help me raise my little brother and persist through college.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

52
**Table 2 (continued)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Year of College</th>
<th>Journal Entry Details</th>
<th>Critical Incident #9: Somebody Is Really Watching Over Me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| December 16, 1997| Sophomore year of college | My recorded experiencing of facing my mother and my brother’s father in the legal system  
*Can’t Nobody Hold Me Down, Mase and Sean “Puffy” Combs*  
|                   | Journal entry        | My recorded experience of my mother telling me she never wanted me  
|                   |                      | My recorded experience of applying for welfare programs to support my family            | Somebody Is Really Watching Over Me                      |
| June 26, 1999    | Senior year of college Journal entry | My experiences of going to church through the college adoption program through the college.  
*Angels Watching Over Me, Richard Smallwood*  
|                   | Journal entry        | My recorded experience that my first college administrator was leaving the institution | Somebody Is Really Watching Over Me                      |
| June 27, 1997    | Senior year of college Journal entry | My first recorded experience of knowing who God was in my life  
*Angels Watching Over Me, Richard Smallwood*  
|                   | Journal entry        | My first recorded experience I had a God that loved and watched over me                | Somebody Is Really Watching Over Me                      |
| May 3, 2000      | Senior year of college Journal entry | My recorded experiences of understanding what it means to be the first person in my family to finish college and not experience prison  
*Angels Watching Over Me, Richard Smallwood*  
|                   | Journal entry        | My first experience of unfair justice system on a college campus                      | Somebody Is Really Watching Over Me                      |
| May 5, 2000      | Senior year of college Journal entry | My recorded experience of being the first person in my family to graduate college  
*Angels Watching Over Me, Richard Smallwood*  
|                   | Journal entry        | My recorded experiences of becoming a mentor to Black girls in Utah.          
|                   |                      | My recorded experiences that my pathway in life was different than what it would have been had I stayed at 1488 Douglass Street  
|                   |                      | My recorded experience of continuous rejection from my mother                   | Somebody Is Really Watching Over Me                      |
Table 2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>February 17, 2011</th>
<th>Post college life Journal entry *Wake Up Everybody, Harold Melvin &amp; The Blue Notes</th>
<th>Critical Incident #10: Wake Up Ashá J</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● My first recorded experience being told I would get a Ph.D. by Dr. Gill</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● My first experience dealing with politics in DEI work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● My first experience of being asked if I knew my worth from a peer mentor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● My experiences of working in systems of education and society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

Data Analysis Procedures

Data Analysis Procedures

1. Identify critical incidents by (re)reading all of my journal entries, (re)listening to music, and (re)watching and (re)reading the interview transcripts. Ten critical incidents from middle school to the present were identified to create the archives.

2. Collate data around incidents. Create Mosaic.

3. Memory Writing, Reflective Writing.

4. Daughtering process included development preliminary codes.

5. Excel spreadsheet moving from codes to themes.
As outlined in Black feminist thought in qualitative inquiry, “daughtering” influences our approaches to data, theory, analysis, and representation of our observations and lived experiences (Evans-Winters, 2019). The thematic data analysis of “daughtering” is a disposition that allows one to process identity, location, words, ideas, and even disposition itself. According to Evans-Winters (2019), the process itself includes “conversations with the ancestors, deliberations with elders, ritual and ceremony, rites of passages, youth-centered pedagogy, and even the rejection of Eurocentric western notions of time and space. We need qualitative research texts that excite hope for the researcher and researched” (p. 9).

The first step in analyzing the data was to hand-code the data. To do this, I used highlighters to color-code the mosaic that included music, memos, and rewatching the mentor interviews. For example, when I discovered that it was an important point to remember, I color-coded it in yellow. When I knew I needed to share something, I color-coded it with pink. When I discovered a link between the critical incident and the research literature, I color-coded it in blue. Finally, I used a purple color-coding when I had questions about what I read or listened to in the data.

**Emerging Themes of Critical Roadblocks**

The goal of the second analytical read was to identify the multiple roadblocks I faced throughout my journal in the educational complex. As part of the analysis, I had to identify the salient roadblocks that arose on multiple occasions in the data to establish the themes that were discovered in the data. I conducted a manual analysis of the data and, as mentioned earlier, the first thing I did was color-code the data with highlighters. After that, I used post-it notes whenever I discovered words or sentences whose meaning was comparable to another. Because
of this process, I was able to (re)member and (re)collect the data that were essential in order to
comprehend and make sense of the salient roadblocks that I encountered.

As a result of this process, the following themes emerged: racism, pushout, being labeled,
needing help, and being silenced were consistent factors that challenged my journey within the
educational complex. These themes are further unpacked and supported in Chapters 5 and 6.

**Themes of Support**

The goal of the third and final analytical read was to determine the various forms of
assistance and encouragement that I received throughout the course of my educational journey.
As a component of the analysis, I identified the most important pillars of support that were
present in the data and appeared multiple times. After conducting a manual analysis of the data,
the first task I did, as mentioned earlier, was to color-code the data using highlighters. After that,
I started making use of post-it notes whenever I came across words or sentences that stood out to
me or were analogous to one another. Because of this method, I was able to comprehend the data
that were necessary to understand and make sense of the critical support structures that I
encountered during my educational journey.

The data uncovered six critical support themes: voice, identity, self-actualization,
assistance from the community, and resilience are the themes that emerged as being essential
forms of critical support from the data points that I encountered. The themes were captured and
organize din an Excel spreadsheet, which ultimately served as the basis for my mosaic. In
Chapter 6, I delve more deeply into these themes and further support them.
Protection of Human Subjects

This study’s informed consent went through the process of being reviewed and approved by the San Diego State University (SDSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB). Before beginning any sort of data collection, consent was acquired (see Appendix B).

For the protection of the participants (mentor interviewees) involved in this study, the following considerations were made in terms of potential benefits and risks and obtaining consent. Participating in this study could have a number of potential benefits, including the release of data that could be of use to both society and science, as well as the instigation of change in educational systems for Black girls and women. During the interview process, participants disclosed education administrators, mentors, former mentees, and other stakeholders. Because I asked the participants personal questions, it prompted them to recall unpleasant experiences; however, this was intentional.

Participants were reminded that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time, which helped to alleviate any potential anxiety they might have felt in social situations. None of the participants who took part in the discussion avoided answering any of the questions that were asked.

There was a potential threat to individuals’ privacy, although I kept identifying information that was gleaned from the interviews in strict confidence. To protect confidentiality, all participants and institutions were assigned pseudonyms.

Limitations

Even though autoethnography was developed to empower oppressed people, some academics may say that this approach does not meet the standards of academic research since it does not contain the perspectives of those who have traditionally been excluded (Chang, 2009;
There are five pitfalls Chang (2007) warned researchers to look out for when using autoethnography as a research tool:

1. Excessive focus on self in isolation of others;
2. Overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation;
3. Exclusive reliance on personal memory and recalling as a data source;
4. Negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives; and
5. Inappropriate application of the label “autoethnography.” (p. 15)

As an autoethnographer, I must sustain a balance as a researcher participant and the researcher to ensure that research is “methodologically oriented, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation” (Chang, 2007, p. 3), so that the research does not lose cultural meaning and capital (Yosso, 2020).

Critical autoethnography and Black feminism in qualitative inquiry provides a space to break down barriers by showing and questioning the complicated relationship between science and white dominance in research (Evans-Winters, 2019). As the researcher and the participant, I am required to disclose willingly my inner feelings and thoughts and self-reflect on triggering and traumatic critical incidents that I experienced in the education system and society. Because of this, the process of autoethnography can be seen as limited since my inner feelings and thoughts are being examined (Chang, 2009).

Chapter Summary

This chapter entailed the research methodologies and techniques I used to answer the research questions. This was a qualitative exploratory approach to analyzing how I was able to navigate and persevere in educational systems rife with racism and oppression of Black girls and women, as detailed in this chapter. I focused on how I understood, interrogated, and deconstructed white-dominating institutions by examining and challenging institutionalized and colonial research methodologies (Bhattacharya, 2017). This chapter described the study’s context, participants, and procedure as well as data collection and analysis steps.
Evans-Winters’ (2019) position is that Black feminism champions and magnifies both the intricacies and complexities of power relationships—this magnification is our mosaic—which we use in pursuits of scientific knowledge for liberation for Black girls and women (p. 19). She advocated that Black girls’ and women’s lived experiences are valid research, and Black feminist thought in qualitative analysis (a) proffers a social critique of traditional research paradigms and interpretations of social relationships; (b) fosters dialogue for understanding unmitigated power and privilege; and (c) strategically agitates the status quo (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 19). With this study, I hope to accomplish each of these.
Music, memos, and mentors were all components that contributed to the development of my life and the experiences that I had. In this chapter, I discuss 10 critical life experiences I encountered in the educational systems and society that have contributed to making me the Black woman I am today. As I investigated these 10 critical incidents throughout my educational career, beginning in middle school and continuing through graduate school, I was able to determine the critical incidents of racism, pushout, being silenced, needing help, and being labeled both within and outside of the educational environment. I consider these critical incidents to be the pivotal moments of my life because they were instrumental in the development of my journey as a Black girl and, more recently, as a woman. Boylorn (2016b) explained that “Blackgirl autoethnography” gives Black girls and women the tools to understand not only the intersections of themselves, but also their (re)lationships individually and their (re)lationships with their praxis. This empowers Black girls and women to do the home/work of self-construction without the influences of racist, classist, and misogynistic culture that take place in the context of school, work, and overall life (Boylorn, 2016b).

In this chapter, I present each critical incident through memos, music mentors, and mentor snapshots. I used memos, first, to identify the critical incidents that I faced within the educational complex. Second, in identifying the music mentor snapshot, I was able to understand my lived experiences through the lens of music and, in some instances, the artist’s lived experiences. Finally, I inserted the mentor snapshot to understand my critical incidents and
supports through the eyes of trusted mentors. Within each of the critical incidents are the emerging themes of racism, labeling, pushing, silencing, and needing help.

I take a final look at the most recent critical incident, which is referred to as “Ashá’s Lyric”; it is unique, different, and visually distinct because it is a conglomeration of my lived experiences that span the past 6½ years of my life up to the present day. It identifies all six critical incidents that I have been through as well as the ones with which I am still dealing at the present moment. In this section, I focus on critical incidents that have become part of my healing process, allowing Black girls and women to find their voice and face as part of my story—which is also their story—in order to understand their lived experiences. In addition, they provide a space for mentors and educators to understand what Black girls and women face in systems of institutionalized education. Equally important, they illustrate the useful and informative direction and support I have received from music, memos, and mentors as I navigated the institutionalized educational and social systems that include the classrooms, workplaces, and communities I faced throughout my life.

Across these incidents, I investigated the emergent themes that were instrumental in helping me discover my voice; comprehend the self-actualization of who I was meant to be; build my resilience while figuring out my identity of who I was and am; and understand that I had a community to help and support me through the joy, pain, sunshine, and rain in my life. These themes are described in Chapter 5.

Figure 2 illustrates the timeline of these critical incidents throughout my life as well as the supports that I received.
Figure 2

Critical Incidents and Supports Timeline
Middle School Years

Critical Incident #1: These Cats Think They Know Me

The Memo: You Don’t Know Me.

You might see me in the street But nigga you don’t know me. When ya holla on the street Rememba you don’t know me. Save all the hatin’ and the poppin’. Nigga you don’t know me Quit tellin’ niggas you my partna Nigga you don’t know me. Don’t be recruitin’ keep it movin’. Nigga you don’t know me. Hey I ain’t trippin’ but the truth is Really you don’t know me. Ya you know they call me T.I., but you don’t know me. You be hatin’ and I see why ’Cause you don’t know me. (Toomp, 2004)

Memo Entry 1: Monday, April 9, 1990, 8th grade (13 years old)

“Get out of my class!” “You are a nuisance!” “In-school suspension for a week.” “You will not graduate from high school and don’t even think about college.” “Why are you wearing that to school? Your grandmother couldn’t dress you any better than that to come to school?” “Why are you here?” “Oh, she gets free lunch.” “Remember, she is one of the at-risk students; her mom is in jail.” “Most of her family is in jail, and we shouldn’t expect anything less from her.” “Head to the office because you are out of here for the week.” “Looks like you will be going home for three days.” “Learn how to follow Cami. She is what a good student looks like.” “Did you know her grandma has two husbands in their house?” “She never met her father before.” “That’s funny she’s a bastard.” I heard all this today at school. I am so mad. I could just hit somebody right now. Today I was sent to in-school suspension because of what happened in class. Our history teacher was teaching about enslaved Africans. Mr. Larry kept saying Black people were slaves because they were only 3/4’s of people. He also said that Blacks loved being slaves because the master’s taught them how to behave. Mr. Larry said the Black slaves liked discipline because they felt loved by their masters. I raised my hand. I told him that they weren’t slaves. They were enslaved Africans stolen from their land and used as cheap labor. That’s what
my granny said. After he said that, Cami called me a “nigger.” I told her to shut her mouth. She kept saying, “nigger, nigger, nigger, you will never be smart as us.” I lost it and told her I would hit her if she kept saying that. The teacher overheard me and told me to get out of class. He walked me to the office, and the assistant principal Tueller took me to his office. I tried to explain to him what happened. He wouldn’t even listen to one thing I had to say. Mr. Tueller said I had an in-school suspension for the next two days. I was allowed to go to the cafeteria to pick up my lunch. I saw Cami, and she called me the nigger again. I am mad. I wish I could just fight them and beat up Cami. She just a stupid white girl. I just wanted to cry, and I walked back to the office. I didn’t cry though. Cuz real niggas don’t cry. That’s what my granny taught me. Why was I in trouble, but she was not? Journal, this don’t make no sense. I don’t like white kids, and I sho don’t like no white teachers. Arrgh, my grandma just told me the lights will be shut-off in the morning. We don’t have food. I heard my grandma say my auntie stole the money and sold the food stamps for some rocks. Journal, peace out. I am over this.

**The Music Mentor: You Don’t Know Ashá.**

My cousins and I were not growing up in a traditional home. We were living with our grandmother, who had two husbands living in the house, and trying to understand the facets of our parents being crack fiends. On top of that, we did not know who our biological fathers were. Our grandparents were “dope dealers” who made us part of their business. I was a Black girl trying to understand who I was, my voice, racism, and how to navigate systems that were not built for me to succeed.

Cami did not even know me at my core, but neither did the teacher. What Cami, Mr. Tueller, and the school administration said to me are expressions I heard often and are part of my individual story that I often heard while navigating through the Utah K-12 education system and
society. The actions of Cami, Mr. Tueller, and the school administrators not only resulted in the silencing of my voice and the ejection from the classroom, but their actions were also connected to racism, and consequently, I found myself in a position where I needed helping hands from a member of the school system. However, rather than assisting me, I was ejected from the classroom while being labeled a disruption to the learning environment. From the beginning of this memo entry, the themes of racism, silencing, being pushed, labeling, and needing help are identified. While in the education pipeline, I spent many days and nights trying to compartmentalize and comprehend the expressions and words of my white peers and white educators. These classroom experiences represent the themes of racism, pushout, silencing, labeling, and needing assistance which connect to the lyrics of T.I.’s song, “You Don’t Know Me.” The song’s lyrics depict the internal struggle of a man trying to make it out of the system, but the system continues to label him and determine who he was. T.I. reflected on how the system tried to determine what they were going to call him.

The lyrics focus on the fact that he was not going to allow a system to name him something; he was going to tell the system how to name and call him. Like T.I., the labels surrounding me and my school experience led to my voice being silenced. If I were to say anything to my peers, teachers, or educators, then I would have been under higher surveillance than my white peers, which would have resulted in punishment (Wang & Leto, 2021). I spent many days in the education system trying to explain myself to white administrators and putting them in place to try to help them understand my voice and who I was.

Being Black and trying to achieve a fair and equitable education in Utah was difficult on various levels. The administration, educators, counselors, lunch ladies, resource officers, and secretaries were white. I had no access to people who liked me, had my lived experiences, or
understood what it was like to live in my skin. White people were able to control the single stories of Black and Brown children in the education system because they held power.

While studying racism from a historical perspective, my journal and T.I.’s song lyrics provided me an opportunity to understand how, as a Black girl, I was being enslaved by racism and being renamed by white folks in systems of education. The main goal of white supremacy, according to Gill and Malveaux (2011), is to show how racist systems use fear to keep African slaves from learning. By sending me to the office for what he thought was bad behavior, Mr. Tueller put me in permanent captivity and made me depend on white systems, as shown in the excerpt from my memo. My journal and T.I.’s lyrics point out how it is possible to understand how slavery is still in existence because I am fighting to survive systems within systems while trying to understand my lived experiences as a Black girl (Gill & Malveaux, 2011). Scholars Gill and Malveaux (2011) argued that racism is still present in educational systems. Black girls and woman in 2023, for example, are still attempting to make sense of the chains of survival within their lived experiences in the educational complex.

Unaddressed implications for me as a Black girl included sociopolitical and historical conceptions of racism in America, as well as the deficit paradigms that control academic ideology and policies. As a result, I was forced to remain on the periphery of education and continue to be pushed out. My journal and the song lyrics help me understand what it means to be told on a continuous and consistent basis that my voice should not be heard. This was in addition to understanding the concepts of racism and being labeled while grasping the concept that I was being pushed out. All five of the themes of racism, pushout, silencing, labeling, and needing help were present within the context of this critical incident.
Critical Incident #2: My Tears Will Pay Off

The Memo: So Many Tears.

Back in elementary, I thrived on misery
Left me alone, I grew up amongst a dyin’ breed
Inside my mind couldn’t find a place to rest
Until I got that Thug Life tatted on my chest
(Shock, 1995, 3:58)

Memo Entry 2: Tuesday, May 15, 1990, 8:30 p.m. (13 years old)

I don’t understand how this life works. My mom is about to be locked up because she robbed a jewelry store with Mr. Cee. My mama love Mr. Cee. Mr. Cee be buying my little brother everything. Mr. Cee always tell my little brother that he gone ride for his son. Mr. Cee be on that Black too. When he comes over here he be sweating and nodding off from that Black. I am never using Black. That stuff have these people be acting crazy. One another thing, my mama is still using Black and crack cocaine. I found a crack pipe in the bathroom this morning and a bag of needles in the back room. I showed my grandpa Tre. he told me don’t touch it. He went and got some gloves and cleaned up the old needles. He then said Ashá you bet not ever touch no Black in yo life. You too smart for that shit. I told my grandpa okay. I thought to myself nigga I ain’t never using no drugs not even no green. Oh, my aunts are crack fiends. My aunt Ginn is selling her body for drugs and bringing random men in and out of the house. My other aunt Fefe is a crackhead. My grandparents are raising me, my five cousins, and my younger brother. Get this, though they sell drugs. How do you sell drugs but you an alcoholic? My grandma be so drunk. Last night my grandma sent me and my cousin to the liquor store and told us to buy some yak. Me and my cousin Deiondre looked at each other like how we gonna buy some yak. We ain’t old enough to. My grandma told us if we did not go get her no yak she was gonna beat our ass. I told Deiondre my nigga let’s walk to the liquor and see what they say.
We walked to the liquor store Mr. Keith was working and he knew why we were there. He took us to the back door and took the money and said when y’all get older don’t drink. He said take this to Ms. Aureila. We got home and my grandma was yelling where the fuck my yak. I said it’s right here it’s right here. She said oh you a little smart bitch. You just might be somebody when you grow up. Ashá street smarts will get you further them books you like. Now get the fuck up out my face. She be trippin.

Now get this journal, my granny calls herself a pharmaceutical sales rep, not in a traditional way, though. My grandma was in there arguing with both my grandfather’s today. The kids at school always ask me why I have two different grandpa’s that live in my house. One day I asked my grandma and she cussed me out and said mind yo business little girl. I guess its normal to have two husbands in one house. Both of them have their own room, and they switch nights when they sleep in my grandma’s room. Well I better mind my business because that’s what granny said. Anyway I got home from school hoping to eat and watch a little tv or go outside, but every day after we finish our homework, we are forced to package drugs for my grandma. Today my grandmother taught us how to cook cocaine. I already know how to weigh it and package it. I finished packaging it. Now I gotta hurry and hide it in the toilet so if the police come they can’t find it.

I am so tired of this, but I have to hurry and finish this. I have to get up for school tomorrow. Oh, school, the teachers are rude. One of my teachers told me to shut up today and said I was not supposed to talk. He did this in front of the whole class. I don’t even wanna go there either. I wish I could just run away. Where would I go? I want to cry. I can’t cry though. Granny said real niggas don’t show emotions. They just boss up. Is this normal? I wonder if other kids at my school have crazy families. I have to live up to my grandma’s expectations. She
said real thugs don’t cry. We thug up. No emotions up in this piece. Emotions make you lose money. And we ain’t got time to lose no money. That’s what she said. My granny hard on me, but I know she love me. I am gonna try to get some sleep.

**The Music Mentor: Not Another Tear Shed.**

I cried so many tears the night I wrote this, and it helped me to understand why Tupac cried and how his lyrics connected to my story. Growing up in this home, I was taught to normalize this unhealthy environment, and the expectation was that I would show up and perform well in school. As I (re)flect back on this memory, I understand that my mental and physical health were not in good condition due to my environment.

My Black girl lived experiences were met with issues in homes, such as stress, unfavorable mental health, family, and cultural differences, coupled with violence, drugs, and other criminal activities happening in my home (Ricks, 2014). I would show up for school, hoping for some peace. At school, I found that teachers chose to silence me, discipline me, and not understand me. When I was in school, I discovered that my teachers preferred to ignore me, discipline me, and put up a wall between us. This memo put me in a position to understand the context of the theme of being silenced within the educational system as well as within the environment of my own home (Fordham, 1993). Educators within systems of education chose punishment rather than trying to understand me and my home life. Suspension became my normal within the system of education.

My hope was that I would find peace at school and have a sense of relief from what was going on at home. After all, the education system is where, as a Black girl, I was hoping educators would help me understand my voice and that educators would create a holistic space that aids in the well-being of me as Black girl and student (Morris & Perry, 2017). The
complexity of my voice as it requested assistance was the recurring theme that ran throughout this memo. It was clear that I needed assistance. I looked for someone to assist me at home and in school, but I discovered that I was unable to obtain the assistance I needed in either of these environments. My experience(s) in K-12 pushed me into a place of tears and misery.

Ah, I suffered through the years and shed so many tears, Lord, I lost so many peers, and shed so many tears (Shock, 1995). Like Tupac, I was suffering through years of family trauma while trying to make sense of tears I was not supposed to shed. In the educational system, I discovered that I had to shrink my personality and voice and that I should not look for love or warmth there. While I understood that educators were not going to be proactive in how they explored the comprehensive approaches that address the needs of me as a Black girl and that my tears did not matter, the tears of white folks mattered more than my Black tears. The two themes of silencing and needing help were present within the context of this critical incident.

**High School Years**

**Critical Incident #3: You Have a Friend Indeed Girl**

**The Memo: Girl What About Yo Friends, Ashá.**

> Every now and then, I get a little crazy
> That’s not the way it’s supposed to be
> Sometimes my vision is a little hazy
> I can’t tell who I should trust or just who I let trust me, yeah (Austin, 1992, 4:55)

*Memo Entry 3: Tuesday, June 25, 1991 (14 years old)*

> Oh, my goodness Journal it’s my birthday. My grandma did not tell me happy birthday, but she did tell me, “Girl, get yo ass down here and cook this dope.” I am only 14 years old and this junk is old. Today, I packaged 80 lbs of that dope. Journal you know anything about that God they be talking bout? The only time I hear a lot about God is from them Mormon kids at
school. But they said Black people don’t go to heaven. One girl told me that the Bible says Black people are bad and were meant to serve white people. I guess God don’t like Black people. I mean I don’t know about that whole God thing.

I heard my grandma talking on the phone today. She was so drunk. She acts crazy when she’s drunk that alcohol. I am never gonna drink when I get older. That stuff makes folks crazy. I heard her say my mama is getting out of jail. I heard her tell whoever she was talking to that my mama was gonna take my brother, but not me. She said, her mama don’t want that girl. She ain’t never wanted her. Hell the girl don’t even know her daddy. That’s how we got stuck with her. That girl real smart though. She get them books honey. Now I just got to make sure she street smart. Those streets are going to rip that girl apart. I told her I build motherfucking soldiers in this bitch. If she gone live here, I’m gonna make sure that the streets don’t break her.

That girl got a heart of gold. You see we named Ashá hope and life because she was born three months early, and only weighed 1.3 lbs. We didn’t think that girl was gone make it. But that baby fought to live. Her name has purpose she gone bring some hope in this life. It hurt my feelings to hear my grandma say that my mama don’t want me. And that I didn’t know my daddy. I do want to know why my daddy don’t want me. My mama hate me. She don’t never say nothing when she come home to me. Like Granny said she was raising a soldier. I’m a be a soldier for the rest of my life. Oh well, like granny always says real thugs don’t cry, they thug up and move on.

One thing cool did happen today I caught the bus today and went to the community center downtown. I met the coolest lady there. Well, I met her because these girls decided they were going to jump me, because I beat their homegirls ass at school last week. These hoes don’t want these hands. I’m a beast in these streets. Like my granny said I’m a solider. I ain’t losing no
fights. My granny told me if I ever lost a fight, she would beat my ass and I would have to fight whoever until I won. That’s what real G’s do. Journal that cool lady stopped me from fighting. She told me I needed to find a different way to do it. She told me she gonna help me get to college one day. Her name is Ms. Shabazz. I was laughing at Ms. Shabazz, because people in my family don’t graduate high school and they sho ain’t going to nobodies college. My nigga we go jail or run this dope game. But ain’t nobody going to college. Ms. Shabazz though she a really nice lady though. She told me she went to a college where a lot of Black people go. It’s called something I think called an HBCU. I am gonna ask her again next time I see her. She said they have lots of fun and you can join a sorority with other Black girls. I don’t know what no sorority is. She showed me a picture, but it still didn’t explain to me what that was. The kids at the community center brought me some candy at the front desk of the community center for my birthday. That was nice of them.

The lady from the community center said she gonna take me to Taco Time for my birthday present. She so nice. She be really trying to talk to me. She gets on my nerves a little though because she always be saying, “Black girl, Black girl you gotta know who you are.” I mean I do my name is Ashá. She asked me today what I like to do at school. I told her I like to write and act. She said I could be a writer or actor. I wish that would be cool. It would help me get up out my granny’s house. For some reason I feel like she really likes me. She always gives me a hug and tells me I am special. She said today, Ashá young lady you are gonna change the world.” She really be believin in ya girl. I wonder why she likes me so much. My grandma tell me be careful folks be trying to run game on you. And she always say, don’t be telling people our business, folks be out to get you, and remember you live here because ya mama didn’t want
you, and you don’t even know ya daddy and he didn’t want you either. Journal granny so funny she don’t just nobody. Especially white people.

Overall, my birthday was alright. I turned 14 but my own family didn’t remember but the folks at the community center had my back. I love going to the Marshall White Center, there so many Black kids there. At school there are only 15 Black kids in the whole school, and we all stay in the office in trouble. Oh yeah the lady said she wanna be my mentor. I gotta look that up I don’t know what a mentor is. She said I got potential and that I am smart, and pretty. She really knows how to make me feel better. I feel so connected to her almost like she could be my mama. Ashá chill out don’t nobody want to be ya mama. I just don’t know if I can really trust her. Some folks be talking crazy just like my granny, but that community lady she might be cool.

**Mentor Snapshot: Ms. Shabazz.**

When she entered the Zoom room, all the memories came flooding back to the moment I met her back in 1991 at the Marshall White Center in Ogden, Utah. I realized Ms. Shabazz has been with me for the last 30 years of my life. Ms. Shabazz has an interesting educational journey and background. Her mentorship was a testament to her true love for Black girls and women in general. Ms. Shabazz was born and raised on the eastern shore of Maryland; she was the youngest of six children and the daughter of an activist mother and a deeply spiritual family, extending all the way down to her grandparents as well. In the late 1960s, after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, her school district was chosen to be one of the first schools to integrate into the white school system. She was in sixth grade, and she recalls the day the administrators came to her house to tell her about the decision:

> And I came home one day from playing. And my principal and several teachers were in my living room, talking to my mom, asking her if I could be one of those students to integrate our high school. My mom being NAACP president and community activist said
yes. And so that experience in my life helped shape a lot of my work and activism from that day forward. (Shabazz, 2022)

In 1975, she moved to Utah after graduating from a historically Black college and university (HBCU) and experienced culture shock, stating it took her “two weeks” to see another Black person in Utah. Ms. Shabazz explained how her positive experiences prior to integration and attending an HBCU helped her understand the importance of Black mentorship and relationships for Black girls and led her to want to mentor Black girls and women. In our interview, I asked Ms. Shabazz how she met me. She smiled and proceeded to answer:

Along with some of the things that I did, I worked at the local community center at Ogden. So ran across Ashá, at the community center, as well as the local high school, and then holding African American youth conferences, as a part of my work with the governor’s office, we held an annual high school conference for Black students, and Ashá was one of the participants in that conference as well. And even from the community center, having the opportunity to have in-depth conversations with Ashá, and later on being able to interact with Ashá on a church level as well. So, across those different platforms.

During our interview, I asked Ms. Shabazz who was Ashá Jones when she first met her. She smiled big, and then she laughed and answered.

Very, let’s say, energetic, outspoken, and ready to use her voice. Yeah, ready to use her voice and her body to deal with whatever’s coming her way. I think one of the earlier encounters I remember you were getting ready to beat up somebody. I think it’s like, Nah, we’re not gonna fight today. And so yeah, that was the first encounter. Other aspects of Ashá you’re very multi-dimensional in your efforts, but definitely what people often call when we are expressive, they call as passionate as Ashá was definitely a passionate person about those things that she felt were important to her, or she felt someone was infringing upon. If you felt someone was infringing upon your, rights and your space and your territory. Now, the aspect that I grew to appreciate with Ashá was your willingness to get involved, to extend yourself to help what I call to build community. Specifically. All of the work you did with, with ladies up today, local step team, making step, a big part of Ogden community and in Utah community a general where, you know, as all of our institutions are PWI. So that traditional step component that we see in other cities that have HBCUs was prevalent, and you helped to bring that front and center as something that not only was done to pass on that tradition, but an opportunity to teach young ladies about themselves about their culture and give them a form to be themselves. (Shabazz, 2022)
Ms. Shabazz explained throughout the interview that when she met me, she saw the potential in me that many other folks would not see right away because they were often dealing with places where systemic racism was prevalent and Black girls were labeled as angry and pushed out. She explained that once you got past my hard exterior, there was a girl who had been broken by family dynamics and an education system that was not built for her. During this critical incident, Ms. Shabazz was not only guiding me on how to make the most of my voice, but she also taught me in the context of the overarching theme of needing assistance. Her guidance was essential for me during this period of my life because she had her own experiences with racism and understood the kind of assistance I needed to navigate the challenging educational system.

Ms. Shabazz explained that Ashá was in need of a positive relationship with someone who wouldn’t violate her and would stick with her. She explained that Ashá has grown in many ways since their first meeting in 1991. When Ms. Shabazz was asked, “Who is Ashá now?” she chuckled again and proceeded to answer:

Well, I skipped a few pieces of Ashá along the way. So Ashá, in higher ed, when I had the opportunity to work with Ashá, first at the University of Utah. I was there when she became a staff person there. Ashá still kept that same passion. And I would say one of the things that I tried to do as a part of Ashá’s community was to help her learn how to fight in different ways. Knowing that there are a lot of issues that need to be addressed, and how we’re able to address those often. Impacted our ability to be productive, our ability to be impactful, our ability for others to even listen to what to listen to what we had to say. And so I think those parts of Ashá are just as important and impactful in those settings as well. (Shabazz, 2022)

Ms. Shabazz also stated:

So Ashá today, I believe Ashá’s had the experience of being a professional, in higher ed and Student Affairs for a number of years. And with that, has come a lot of growth and development for her. In those arenas, I think the passion is still there. But I think as we grow and learn, we start understanding people better, and we start understanding ourselves better. We pay attention to what works and doesn’t work. And so I think Ashá has taken those experiences to develop a style to help her be successful in not just higher
ed, but any arena that she would find herself in, sometimes still a little hot-headed, sometimes feeling that she has to fight every fight. And again. Yeah, you know, I think that’s, that’s still a part of her, but I think she’s learned how to temper and recognize when it’s time to do A, B, or let what parts of her persona, take center stage. (Shabazz, 2022)

**The Music Mentor: Trust How Does This Work?**

TLC created this song which talked about connections and trust in relationships. Ms. Shabazz did a few things for me in my early developmental stages of Black girlhood, the first being that she took the time to get to know me, even though I was not the easiest to get to know because of all the internal drama that I had experienced. Second, she also showed me what positive relationships with boundaries looked like. Despite the fact that she is not my biological mother, she decided to water a concrete rose because she saw beyond the concrete. She taught me to trust her by showing me who she was and why I could trust her. She taught me what I could trust her with, and that was my heart. My heart had been so broken that she chose to love my heart and me. She showed me that she was not going to give up on me. Ms. Shabazz was helping me to conceptualize and understand the theme of needing help and then receiving help.

As a Black girl who was searching for my mother’s garden or “other” parent figures, she understood that she could sow seeds of trusting mentorship, discipline, and understanding of my culture and identity (Cropps & Esters, 2018). Third, she taught me that support provided me with the opportunity, as a Black girl, to identify my freedoms in knowing who I was in and out of the classroom. She showed me how to not deny my own space to fit in and adopt the dominant culture’s characteristics without losing my authentic self. As my other mother, she played a vital role in developing me into who I am today, in and out of education systems and society (Spruill et al., 2014). Within this critical incident, needing assistance was the recurring theme that was demonstrated.
Critical Incident #4: Even the Strong Figure Out How to Survive

The Memo: Douglas Street Is the South Central of Ashá’s Family.

Don’t get caught up. Cause niggas are doing anything that’s thought up. And they got a price on everything from dope, to stolen merchandise. Weed to sherm cause South Central L.A., is one big germ waitin for a brother like you to catch a disease and start slangin ki’s. To an undercover or the wrong brother and they’ll smother, a out of town motherfucker. So don’t take your life for granted cause it’s the craziest place on the planet. In L.A., heroes don’t fly through the sky of stars. They live behind bars so everybody’s doin’ a little dirt and it’s the youngsters puttin’ in the most work so be alert and stay calm as you enter, the concrete Vietnam. You say, the strong survive shit, the strong even die, in South Central. (Nicolaides, 1991)

Memo Entry 4: April 10, 1993, 12:31 a.m.

So I woke up in the middle of the night because I heard something. It was my auntie Ginn man she was blowed off that Black. She be on that Black boy. I saw her go into the room with some white man. I never seen him before. I heard him tell her get on the floor and suck him. This house is crazy they hoeing, and drugged up. This shit can’t be normal. Anyway, oh shit there a knock at the door. I see blue and red lights. I gotta get to the bathroom. Oh, shit! I forgot to hide the dope!

2:53 a.m.

Yo, journal I am back. That shit was crazy. They had the whole swat team came up in here. They had us all laid out on the floor. The floor smells so bad too. Me and all my cousins make pallets on the floor and sleep in the living room, and my little brother always pisses everywhere. My grandma gave me the look and I asked the police officer if I could go to the bathroom. They let me go to the bathroom and I was able to get the dope into the trap in the toilet. I came back out and the police told me to get my cousins together because my grandma was going to jail. My grandma had a kilo in her room. I forgot about that kilo. I should have
went back and doubled checked everything. They said we were gonna go to a safe house. I asked the police if I could call a cousin to come stay with us until my grandpa came home from work. I begged them to not take us to the safe house because I knew the people from the state would separate us and I had to keep us together. The police said yeah that’s fine. They took my grandma out with them. My granny told them, Motherfucker I’ll be out by 8 a.m. y’all can’t keep a real g down. Sometimes I just wish my grandma would chill. Journal I am gonna go to bed. I gotta be up by 6 a.m. to get everyone ready for school.

**Music Mentor Snapshot: But, Girl You Surviving.**

In 1991, the *Boyz N the Hood* album dropped at the height of the gang wars in Los Angeles, and the war on drugs resulted in a number of social consequences that affected Black families in the early 1990s (Murch, 2015). As a Black girl growing up in the 1990s, I witnessed the effects of the drug war on my family and the backlash on how people in my family were locked up at a higher rate than white people in my neighborhood, and violence was at an all-time high. The war on drugs disproportionately negatively impacted people of Black diaspora in my family and the larger society, contributing to the pervasiveness of racism in this critical incident. So when the *Boyz N the Hood* album dropped, it was straight fire, and the song in particular that I connected this journal to was “How to Survive in South Central.” The street game has rules, and if you don’t follow them, niggas or the police are waiting to shut you down. As a Black girl in high school, I knew that if we didn’t package that dope in my grandmother’s house, we would end up on the streets (Joseph & Pearson, 2002).

*Rule number three: don’t get caught up. Cause niggas are doing anything that’s thought up* (Nicolaides, 1991). It was my responsibility to protect the dope while simultaneously being responsible for protecting my younger cousins and my brother. I was to be alert at all times,
watching who was coming in and out of the house. My aunt was ruthless, and she was off that Black. My aunt did not care how she got her supply; she brought multiple men in and out of the home. The song’s lyrics outline how, as a “g.” you have to know the games of the street; if you do not know the rules of the street, you will not survive. To survive in my grandmother’s house, you must understand that anyone can make a move at any time and be up to anything. You had to stay alert. It was necessary for me to remain silent about what was going on in my house in order for me to maintain my state of being alert and avoid getting caught up in the situation.

In L.A., heroes don’t fly through the sky of stars, They live behind bars (Nicolaides, 1991). My L.A. was my granny’s house, and I was trying to make sense of how to survive and thrive in a crazy environment that, as a 14-year-old girl, I should not have even had to experience. I understood that we had a different type of hero at my house, and I should not expect to see real heroes in systems of education either. Furthermore, I was trying to understand and reconcile the fact that a majority of my family was living behind bars, and I was trying to figure out how that would not be my pathway. As a young Black girl, I was looking for assistance to navigate my lived experiences. The song’s lyrics said “heroes don’t fly through the sky of stars,” and I searched for my hero within the stars. I was cognizant that I needed and wanted assistance in order to navigate the streets of life successfully.

So everybody’s doin’ a little dirt. And it’s the youngsters puttin’ in the most work. So be alert and stay calm. As you enter, the concrete Vietnam. You say, the strong survive. Shit, the strong even die, in South Central (Nicolaides, 1991). I felt a great sense of shame knowing that I was doing dirt even if it was not by choice, and like the song’s lyrics state, it’s the youngsters puttin’ in the most work. I was putting in the work for my family. My grandmother reminded me that I had to stay alert at all times, watching the room. My ability to watch the room would
provide me with the ability to navigate the concrete jungle of the trap game. My grandmother explained that you die three ways: 1. You die with the streets. 2. You die for the streets, or 3. You die because of the streets. The song lyrics say: Even the strong die in South Central. I chose to fight back by understanding the streets but not being in them. My goal was to stay alert and protect my cousins and brother. The streets were not going to take me or them. The education system for me was also the streets. I was navigating landmines left and right and trying to figure out how to not get suspended or in trouble at school. I knew at this age that being alert and watching people would be how I as a Black girl would always have to navigate the streets, whether that was the dope streets for my granny or streets of institutionalized racism in systems of education.

I was aware that in the context of my family, if I went against my grandmother’s instructions regarding the duties that were assigned to me, I would be pushed out of position within my family structure. On the other hand, I was subjected to discrimination at school at the hands of my white counterparts, who treated me differently simply because I was Black and held a higher position of power within society. It was apparent to me that I had a great deal of trouble comprehending the ways in which racism affected me in the educational complex, which I regarded as being part of my “south central” of life. Within the context of this critical incident, the following three recurring themes appeared: silencing, needing assistance, and being pushed out.

**Critical Incident #5: The Walls Are Closing in on Me**

**The Memo: If These Walls Could Talk.**

Last night I heard the screaming
Loud voices behind the wall
Another sleepless night for me
It won’t do no good to call
The police always come late
If they come at all (Kershenbaum, 1988)

Memo Entry 5: Wednesday, May 31, 1995, 7:42 p.m.

Journal, what’s up homie. There is so much going on. This week has been crazy. I graduate high school tomorrow, but I have bruises all ova my face. So my cousin Chamani was talking shit this week and told me I was stupid and I wouldn’t make it through college even though I got accepted. I bucked up to that nigga and said, “Fuck you my nigga. You need to worry about taking care of that baby you just had and can’t take care of.” My granny heard me and she was pissed. Chamani never got in trouble and he was always reckless. He was the first grandchild. He was my aunt Ginn’s son I think that’s why he so crazy. Cuz she crazy. Ha Ha. Anyway journal. My granny asked me, “What did you say lil bitch. Don’t let them books get you fucked up.” Then granny told my cousins to line up and told me to get in the center. She told my aunt Fefe to come into the room. She looked at them and said, “run that bitch.” I put my hands up and I was ready to go. Soldiers stay ready at all times, cu if you don’t you will get caught slipping. Four of my cousins started attacking me. I was swinging every way I could. My cousins Chamani and Cornell pinned me to the ground. My aunt Fefe said “stomp that bitch stop that bitch” Chamani and Cornell kept hitting me in the head. And someone stomped my head. Granny said girl get the fuck up and fight. As I got up Chamani kicked me in the eye, and I felt like my eye bust. I refused to cry. I got up and then my Aunt Fefe started fighting me. My grandma said, Don’t think just cuz you graduating tomorrow that really means something lil bitch. I bet you won’t get beside yourself at 1488 Douglas Street no more. She told them to back off me and told me to go clean my face. I refused to cry in front of them. Journal, my face is so jacked up, I can’t be at graduation with a Black eye. My friend, Chau does make up I am gonna ask if she will do my make-up tomorrow before we walk.
Journal, my aunt Ginn brought that white man in the house again a few hours ago, but my little cousins Bebe and Cece kept crying and asking if they could sleep near me. I told them they could. Bebe kept crying and saying, Cousin Ashá I am so sorry they fight you all the time, but you always protect me. Promise you will never leave. Bebe is only 12 and she stay being attached to me. Cece be with me all the time, but she is so angry all the time. Anyway, I made our pallets. I had a really bad headache from the fight earlier. I can’t wait to graduate and then go to the dorms for Upward Bound. I promise I am never coming back to live at this house once I am gone. I had to tell Bebe to stop crying. I noticed that white man came out the room. Bebe grabbed me so tight when he came out. My grandpa Tre told us we need to go to bed. Bebe said to me, cousin please please don’t leave me. I told Bebe chill out and go to bed. Bebe finally went to sleep. OMG journal I am going to be a high school graduate. Plus I am going to college. Ms. Shabazz told me that I was gonna go to college. I wonder if they have a sorority like she talked about at my college. Journal I am out. I gotta early morning, plus I got cook this dope at 5:00 a.m. before I head out to school. Aight journal I’m gone.

11:49 p.m.

Journal, I woke up because I had to go to the bathroom. I noticed Bebe was not sleep next to me She was gone. I went to check the bathroom and she was not in there. I seen that white man in the back room, and my Aunt Ginn was not with him. I ducked around the corner to see who was in that back room. I heard something, I ran to the door and I could hear groaning. I busted the door open. That white man didn’t have no clothes on and he was on top of Bebe with his private parts on her. I started screaming, get off her, get off her. He hopped up and struck me in the face and said get out you little bitch. I saw a bat and I picked it up and I started yelling
louder get off her get off her. I said if you don’t get off her I am gonna crack your mother fucking head, white man. That white man said, little bitch you won’t do nothing. I raised the bat and I was gonna hit him. I promise I was. Grandpa Tre must have heard me yelling. He came in and he grabbed me and said what the hell is going on. I said that white man was putting his penis on Bebe. He touched Bebe and grandpa I couldn’t help her. I couldn’t help her. I broke down crying. My grandpa pulled out his pistol and held it to that white man’s head and told him to get the fuck outta here. I grabbed Bebe and told she was gonna be okay. My grandpa got him out the house. My Aunt Ginn came from downstairs and she asked what was going. I was crying even though granny said real thugs don’t cry. I told her you brought that nasty white man in here and he touched Bebe. My aunt Ginn said, you stupid little bitch I sold Bebe to him. That’s how I was gonna pay my rent this month. I couldn’t use your fat ugly ass because don’t nobody want you. You fucked up my money you little bitch and you gone pay for it. My aunt Ginn hit me in the face. My grandpa told her to stop, but she struck me again. Now my grandma woke up. She was like what the fuck is going on up in here. Grandpa Tre told her. My granny started cussing out my aunt Ginn. My aunt Ginn said why would you believe Ashá over me? My granny told me and Bebe to get out. I just heard them yelling back and forth for like two hours. My aunt Ginn finally came out, and she said to me, Lil bitch I will make sure we erase the memory of you in this family. She grabbed my granny’s photo album, and she took all the pictures out and went to the kitchen and set my pictures on fire. My granny came out and told me and Bebe to go to her room. Bebe and I crawled in the bed and I just made sure I didn’t let Bebe go.

Journal this is all my fault. I was supposed to protect Bebe. She was trying to tell me something was going on and I ignored all the signs of what was going on. My granny came into the room and told Bebe to never tell anyone what happened. She said now lay down and go to
bed. She said Ashá Mae you got a big day tomorrow, you are graduating high school. You are my first grandchild to graduate and be accepted into college. You have to cook that dope before you head out tomorrow, but remember girl no matter what your name means hope and life. The days won’t get easier, but I built a G in you homegirl. Real G’s never thug down. We thug up. I love you. Wow, journal, that’s the first time I can remember her telling me she loves me. Journal, I ain’t going to sleep but I am gonna make sure Bebe is good. I’m out.

6:50 a.m., Thursday, June 1, 1995

Hey, journal I am tired as fuck. I didn’t go back to sleep. I can’t believe this shit. I am graduating high school today. I didn’t think I was gonna make it to this day. Yo, I am graduating with a 3.03 GPA even after spending 324 days in in-school or out of school suspension. Them white folks put me out the classroom so many times, but I was determined no matter what I was going to graduate high school. I cooked 100 lbs of dope and packaged about 50 lbs for distribution before school. I will get to the rest after school today and right before graduation. Alright, journal I am outta of here. I gotta meet Chau at 8:30 a.m. in the girls bathroom on the fourth floor before all the other seniors get there so she can cover this Black eye up.

8:30 a.m.

I got to the bathroom, and Chau said girl, What the fuck happened? I was like my nigga, my cousins jumped me. She said the blood vessel in your eye is busted. I was like girl how you know. She said girl you got blood in your eye. I read in a book that is what happens when a vessel has been popped. Journal, Chau is smart as fuck. Her daddy is a doctor. She is gonna be a doctor one day too. Journal, you think I could be a doctor? Anyway, it’s graduation day and we about to be up out this school and I don’t have to see this whack principal who hates Black kids. If it was up to him I wouldn’t even be graduating. Fuck you Barry Gotham run me this diploma.
Alright journal, I gotta go. Chau hooked my face up. I wonder if my crush is in the rotunda waiting for me. That boy fine. I mean hella fine.

9:45 p.m. Graduation night

Journal, I did it. I walked across that stage. Ms. Shabazz from the community center was there, and the director of Upward Bound came. That Ms. Shabazz gave me a hug and told me she was proud. She said, “Ashá J always fight with the books not your hands. Your time is now. Black girl, Black girl do you know who you are?” She had to go right after that because someone else she knew from the community center was graduating. Yo Ms. Shabazz really be riding for your girl. Ms. Shabazz sho believe in me.

My granny and grandpa Tre didn’t come, but guess who showed up high off that Black foaming at the mouth? My motherfucking momma. That shit was so embarrassing. She was foaming at the mouth and high as fuck. I mean why did she even come? She told me she didn’t want me, and my granny told me that she probably wasn’t coming. She even brought Mr. Cee with her. Mr. Cee walked up and said, “Little girl congratulations, you know I am the closest thing you got to a daddy.” Why did even say that? He handed me a small bag and told me to open it. So, I did. It was a hundred bill, a needle and some Black. Why would he give me some Black and a needle? I don’t mess with no drugs at all. I told him I didn’t want it. My mom said, “Little bitch you better take it.” I said I’m good and I went to walk away and my mom pulled my hair. She said, “Don’t make me fuck you up in here. Take that shit, and be grateful somebody showed up for your little ugly ass.”

Chau came up and asked if we could take a picture. I looked at my mom and Mr. Cee and they said go. I had already put the bill in my pocket. My mom snatched the bag from me. It still had the Black and the needle in it. She told Mr. Cee let’s go baby. They got the hell up outta
there and Chau and I went met up with our friends. I had to come straight home after graduation because I didn’t package that other dope. Journal, the Upward Bound program starts in 19 days and I am leaving this house and never coming back. I am so excited because two of these white girls that have been down for me since 8th and 9th grade are going to college with me too. I don’t trust white girls too much, but these two right here. They are pretty down for me. Melly and I played soccer together since 6th grade, and I met Vecky freshman year in the rotunda. She was like girl who are you and I was like girl who are you? Since that day we have been friends. Journal graduation night was crazy but ya girl is out this house in just a few weeks my nigga. Journal once I leave I am never coming back to this dope house. Journal, I am going to college. I still can’t believe it. People in my family go to jail or sell dope and I ain’t going to jail or selling no dope. I definitely ain’t never using no drugs or drinking that stuff that makes folks crazy. Anyway, homie I am out. 19 days just 19 days.

**The Mentor Snapshot: Ms. Shabazz**

Many aspects come alongside walking around with wounds in this world, including the physical and psychological damage I hold from never having experienced a childhood without the manifestation of a toxic home life and a racist educational system. One of these contributing aspects is realizing I am a wounded soldier in this societal and educational system. Within the structure of the education system, there are Black girls and women who, much like myself, are “walking wounded” (Orbe & Boylorn, 2020).

I struggled with trust as I shifted within the constraints of my wounds. Many questions I would ask myself were: Who could I talk to? What did a trusted voice look like? Where might I find a trusted voice? After having my trust betrayed by members of my family who should have been trustworthy individuals, I was 14 years old and still working through the trauma of the
numerous betrayals at the hands of the adults in my life. But I was relieved when I discovered a reliable and trustworthy Black woman I could finally trust. That source was Ms. Shabazz.

During my interview with Ms. Shabazz, she mentioned that one of the things she picked up on about me during our interactions was that I did not trust people, that I always had my guard up, and that I would watch how people moved so that I would know how to make my next move.

As was mentioned earlier, Ms. Shabazz had an interesting background: She had attended her first school in a predominantly Black environment, but then, when she was in middle, she moved to a predominantly white, integrated, but still segregated environment. She recognized that her life was very similar to mine when it came to trusting people. She had constructed walls of silence as a means of protection, so she understood the walls I had built to keep others out. She stated that she felt a strong obligation to Black girls and women in educational and societal systems, and she described her voice as a mentor as rare. She noted:

I think to have a voice that is trusted and respected. A lot of it is behind the scenes. If I was standing out front, all the time, oftentimes, my presence spoke by itself, I think I came in letting people know that I’m no nonsense kind of person. I’m not gonna cuss you out, but I am gonna set you straight, I am going to tell you what I believe. And so that’s how I tried to do that advocacy, most of it was in somebody’s office, whether it was the vice president’s office, the president’s office, or the program coordinators office, being able to speak up for yourself and others that I felt were not being treated fairly and even myself at times. (Shabazz, 2022)

As I (re)flect on my experiences with Ms. Shabazz, I find that not only could her voice be trusted, but there was a need to respect it. She helped me understand that if I had a problem, she would advocate for me and made it clear that she was my advocate. She advocated for me when she knew the circumstances were not my fault; however, if my attitude was getting in the way, she would challenge me and put me in my place. Ms. Shabazz enlightened me to the fact that I owned a voice that I could employ when interacting with her and in the educational complex.
She guided me in separating things into categories and gaining an understanding of the concept of acquiescing to being silenced, which did not have to be my position in life. Second, she clarified for me the concept that I could approach her for assistance whenever I needed it and that I could do so, regardless of the situation I was experiencing.

On the other hand, she was a safe haven of peace and comfort, just as a mother should be for her daughter. However, because of the walls I still had my guard up. Ms. Shabazz began to teach me what steadfast and consistent support was and looked like. Ms. Shabazz and her support, I now realize, began the process of understanding who I was and who I will become. At the same time, she let people at school know that she would support me, no matter the circumstances. She provided me with the support that was steady and reliable throughout the process of figuring out how to trust others as a Black girl—something that both my heart and my soul yearned for. She was able to hear my silent screams coming from behind the walls.

**The Music Mentor: Last Night I Heard the Screaming.**

*Last night I heard screaming.* When I think about what took place within those four walls at 1488 Douglas Street in Ogden, Utah, 84404, many thoughts simultaneously run through my head. I am thinking about the lyrics of this song, particularly the loud voices in the wall. What would they say if those walls could talk at 1488 Douglass Street? Would my life have been different? Bebe was being robbed of her childhood innocence by that white man, and I do not (re)member hearing her scream out in fear and panic. As a critical observation of how I was navigating this world as a Black girl living in an environment that was filled with molestation, anger, domestic abuse, domestic violence, and drugs, Tracy Chapman gave me the opportunity to share my fear, frustration, anger, rebellion, and feelings of loneliness through her lyrics.
Tracy Chapman’s lyrics were a critical witness to how I was navigating this world (Love, 2012). Not only did I not hear the screams of my cousins, whose screams were hidden behind the walls, but I realized I had silenced my voice and screams within these four walls of my home and systems of education. Audre Lorde (1984) suggested, “While we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us” (p. 61). The lyrics spoke to the psychological and physical damage I experienced and how I quickly acquiesced to silence because silence allowed me to keep the pain on the inside and remain the “g” that my grandmother raised. The lyrics became my safe place to understand what was happening within the walls so when I left home, I tried to leave those items behind the walls.

Dr. Chandra Gill explained that “Black girls climbing the mountains of molestation, abuse, rape, rejection, being given away, thrown out, shut out, betrayed, cursed, attached, and unprotected…is a prime example of the theme pushout” (Gill & Malveaux, 2011). My lived experience with not only my abusers but also the abusers of my cousins taught me that when they got what they wanted from us, we were left not only with the pain of being pushed out but also with the complexities of how we would move forward in our lives. This was true whether they were my abusers or the abusers of my cousins.

As I was climbing these mountains, these words resonated with me because I lived through these experiences within the four walls of my house and the education system. The silent screams of my childhood connected to the lyrics; it was a silence that chilled my soul, and I was constantly praying that I was dreaming, but I was not; it was my reality. The walls were my lived experiences from 1488 Douglas Street, and they would be a part of me for the rest of my life.

My granny grew up in the Jim Crow era in Pinola, Mississippi, and she watched her home and family be abused by white folks in that area. I sense that part of her freedom from her
childhood was the sex, money, and drugs; it became her essence of liberty. It’s how she dealt with the silent screams of her realities and lived experiences. After talking to various members of my family, I discovered that my grandmother had a difficult childhood, and men and alcohol provided her with an escape from the toxic environment in which she was raised. As I continue to analyze my grandmother’s life, I have come to the conclusion that her love of men was as catastrophic as her love of alcohol (Boylorn, 2009). It also helped to realize my drug of choice was education. I could get lost in books and activities to somewhat hide the pain of the walls.

As a Black girl, I did not have anywhere to turn to work through the wounds I carried. No one at home was going to listen. I could not go to school to process what was happening at home. I was Black, a girl, and wounded in Utah while trying to figure out a racist school system while being rejected at home. Nobody at home gave a damn about my wounds; in fact, many of the severe wounds I have now were inflicted by those I called family. Behind the walls, lyrics provides space for me to attempt to make sense of the pain of suffering in silence. Ashá was refusing to allow the pain of my past to stifle my future growth. I was a champion that was meant to break the walls down.

As a Black girl, I tried to figure out how to heal from blaming myself for what happened to Bebe, while also understanding why my aunt Ginn would burn pictures of me to erase the memory of me. I never talked about what it meant to suffer in silence within the four walls of my granny’s house. However, I was scared to speak to anyone outside the four walls of that house. As a Black girl, I was locked behind the walls but wanted to be free, and the song allowed me to figure out that freedom. Within the context of this critical incident, the following three recurring themes appeared: silencing, needing assistance, and being pushed out.
College Days, They So Quickly Pass Away

Critical Incident #6: Ashá in Her Own World

The Memo: Me Against the World

It’s just me against the world Ooh, ooh. Nothin’ to lose, it’s just me against the world baby Oh, ah ah I got nothin’ to lose. It’s just me against the world Oh-hahhh Stuck in the game. Me against the world baby. Can you picture my prophecy? stress in the city, the cops is hot for me The projects is full of bullets, the bodies is droppin’ There ain’t no stoppin’ me. (Mo be, Easy, 1995)

Memo Entry 6: Monday, August 28, 1995

Yo, journal! Ya girl made it to college. The first week has been so cool. First of all let me tell you about the boys on the football team. I ain’t never seen so many cute Black boys in my life. Them boys is from Cali and Vegas. When I graduate from college I am moving to Cali. Them Cali boys is something else. Wait, I have so much to tell you journal. Ms. Shabazz helped me get all the stuff from my dorm room. I can’t believe it for the first time in my life I have my own bed. But yo, I got this weird white girl living with me. I swear she be watching me sleep. She’s a freaking weirdo. We have to take showers in this big bathroom. I be watching my back in the bathroom. My cousin told me what when she was in jail girls would try to attack her in the bathroom. She taught me how to watch my back. Now back to my room. My room is so cool. I even got my own phone number. I don’t have to share my phone with that weird white girl. Journal, I have four classes. Let’s see intro to dance, public health, tennis, and soccer the academic advisor said I should take these classes. I mean I love to dance, and I played tennis and soccer in high school, but that public health class is gonna be hard. Journal, I am gonna head out. The Black Student Union is having a meeting and I want to go meet some of the other Black students.
Tuesday, August 29, 1995

Journal, I am tired as I don’t know what. The Black Student Union meeting was so fun. It got a little wild there. There was this white girl from West Chester New York there, and these other girls were about to fight her. The white girl was cool, she was just there with some other girls, but I guess some of the girls were mad because the dudes was on her. Anyway, we were having a dance contest and nobody would be my dance partner. The white girls said she would be my partner. Man me and that girl was giggin next thing you know a fight broke out, and they jumped the white girl. That junk wasn’t cool so I stopped them from jumping the white girl. Then started swinging on me. Man I whooped them girls ass. These girls didn’t know me my granny raised a g and I ain’t never losing no fight. But here’s where the shit got sticky. These girls from high school showed up too who I fought over the summer. Wait no journal I whooped they ass several times over the summer.

Journal you already know on sight if I saw them chicks they was catching hands. So they rolled up on me and we started fighting. The white girl stepped up and was swinging we beat them girls ass, too. At this point I am 11-1 in these streets. The streets will never beat me journal in college or out of college. Anyway one of the RA’s come over and said she needed to talk to me. She asked who was all in the fight, I said what fight. I mean did she really think I was going to be in these streets tellin on folks. She got me all the way fucked up. Anyway, I wouldn’t tell and the white girl wouldn’t tell so said she was referring me to the dean’s office. Why was I the only one being referred to the dean. I guess because I didn’t snitch. I was not too worried about it it’s not like I ain’t been in trouble in school before. On our way up the elevator I met a Black girl on the track team. She said, girl I am trying to be yo friend because if I ever need someone to fight for me you the one girl. We laughed.
Wednesday, August 30, 1995.

Yo journal, I have to meet with the dean at 9:30 a.m. I have a 11:00 a.m. class so hopefully this junk don’t take too long. I went to the dean’s office and he asked me what happened. I said I got in a fight. He said with who. I said I don’t know, I just started school here this week. He said, Listen Ashá I can expel you from school today if I want to because I have the power to do so. I looked at him, and said, white man I understand you have the power do whatever you want, but that fight wasn’t my fault so do what you gotta do. He said, Ashá I am gonna give you a chance, but just know I am watching you. You will need to go to anger management and do 20 hours of campus community service. I basically said okay and left. I got back to my room after class and the weird white girl’s stuff was gone. There was a note that said to come to the front desk to talk to my RA. I went to go to talk to RA. My RA was white and she said she didn’t want to be the one to tell me where the white girl went. So she had the other RA who was mixed with Black and Mexican tell me what was going. Basically the white girl said that she didn’t want to live with me because I was Black. She said that Black people were evil and her parents wanted her out of the room with me. Her parents said that because she was Mormon and I was not Mormon the reason she needed to move out of our room. See journal, I told you that white girl was weird. But them Mormon kids be weird too. They really have problems with Black people. I remember in middle school and high school how the Mormon kids will tell us that Black kids were sin. I still don’t understand that whole God thing, but at least I have the room to myself now.

Thursday, August 31, 1995

Yo journal, what’s up I am so irritated I had to go to my granny’s house because she called and said I had some mail there. I also need to get a car because I have to get a job to help
with some of my school bills. Ms. Shabazz from the community center told me to go to a local car dealership and they can help me get a car. So I went to the car dealership before I went to my granny’s. They said I had to apply for a loan. I waited for over an hour for them to tell me I couldn’t get a loan. The salesman came out and said that my application was denied because my credit wasn’t good enough. I don’t even know what credit is. He showed me this report with all these loans, credit cards, and utility bills in my name. My Aunt Fefe and Aunt Ginn’s name were attached the bills. I asked the salesman to explain credit to me. He tried but I didn’t understand. I called the lady from the community center and she explained in words I could understand. Basically, my aunt’s had been taking credit out in my name since I was 13 years old and hadn’t been paying the bills on them.

I went to my granny’s house and she looked very sick. I told her what happened at the car dealership, and she just looked at me with a blank stare. Then my aunt’s came to this house. My grandma handed me my mail. The mail was an American Express credit card. She said she found it and wanted to give it to me. Anyway journal the crack head aunts rolled into the living room. I said something to them. I said, y’all are scandalous, why would you do this to me? My Aunt Ginn said, lil bitch I don’t give a fuck about you, my whole goal is to ruin your life. I told her that she was stupid and would die by that crack pipe she smoked everyday. She slapped me and I went to hit her back. My granny stopped me and said, Ashá get out of here and go back to college. This ain’t your home anymore. I was pissed off. I left and caught the bus back to school. Journal how am I supposed to survive this world when everything in the world is against me? I am never going back to 1488 Douglas Street unless I absolutely have to. I hate that fucking place. Journal I’m out.
Saturday, September 2, 1995

Yo journal, last night was so much fun. I got to hang out with the seniors on the football team. We was dancing and tearing that party up. Journal everyone was getting high and drunk. Some of the players on the team asked if I wanted to hit the blunt. I was like hell naw, I ain’t smoking no green. I forgot to lock my door room and when I got back three of the football players were sitting in my room. Asked them how they got into my room, and they were like girl you left the door open. It was Mini, Sax, and Kevon, but what’s crazy is they are the starters on the football team. And I am a freshmen and they were hanging out with me. Mini, said hey freshmen we came here to talk to you and put you on some game. We are gonna be your big brothers on campus. We ain’t gonna let these dudes on the team run through you, and girl we gonna help you with that temper. You can’t be fighting so much. These white folks will put you out of school. You too smart and way to cute to be fighting like that. I told Mini, I am a soldier though and I refuse to get beat in these streets. Mini said baby sis you won’t we got you. Mini, said I sense you’ve been through a lot in your life, but know now that you are a Weber girl. You’re a wildcat. You family and ain’t Ashá against the world. We stayed up until like 4 a.m. We had so much fun and they put me on their list so I got to sit on the sidelines with the team. Ooowee them white girls gone be mad at me. Because they swear the Black boys on the team only want them. Yo, journal them boys are so cool. I am a feeling I am going be friends with them for the rest of my life. Alright journal I am out!


Tupac Amaru Shakur showed up at the Quad Recording Studios in Times Square on November 30, 1995, stoned out of his mind, to start recording the album Me Against the World. He was accompanied at the time of his arrival at the recording studio by a trio of associates, none
of whom were his bodyguards. Following his arrival, he was greeted by three more men who were dressed in army fatigues. Tupac did not give any thought to the clothing that they wore because he assumed that they were affiliated with Biggie in some way and that it was a prevalent fashion choice in Brooklyn at the time. Tupac spotted another rap artist known as Lil’ Cease, who was associated with Biggie. Therefore, he did not believe he needed to have any additional safeguards around him. As soon as he entered the elevator, the three men dressed in fatigues drew their 9-mm guns and ordered everyone inside to get down on the floor (Westhoff, 2016).

Tupac, being the “g” that he was, reached for his gun, which led to him being shot, beaten, and having his jewelry stolen. Tupac pretended to be dead until the other men had left; he staggered into the elevator and rode up the elevator; when the doors opened, he saw Biggie, Puffy, and Haitian Jack’s associate, Henchmen. Tupac asserted that the crew acted guilty and was shocked that he was still alive. Puffy expressed concern over Tupac’s health and stated that they were concerned about his well-being. Tupac’s critics believed that he was arrogant and lacked humility; consequently, it was necessary for him to experience humiliation. In fact, in an interview with Henchmen that was published in Vibe magazine, he stated that “Nobody came to rob you; they came to discipline you” (Westhoff, 2016). Investigators with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) have determined that Biggie’s crew was not responsible for his shooting. The LAPD had the illusion that he accidentally shot himself when he reached for his gun. The LAPD stated that Biggie’s crew wanted Tupac dead; he would have been dead.

One day later, on December 1, 1994, Tupac arrived at the courtroom in New York City bruised from the fight and confined to his wheelchair. He was sentenced to a minimum of one year and a half in jail, and his bail for his court case was set at three million dollars. Tupac was unable to post bail, and he spent the majority of his time behind bars as a result. While he was
incarcerated on March 14, 1995 (Westhoff, 2016), he released his third album, titled *Me Against the World*, which detailed his struggle against the world as well as his paranoia, anguish, and pain as a result of everything he had been through in his life.

*The projects is full of bullets, the bodies is droppin’ There ain’t no stoppin’ Constantly movin’ while makin’ millions Witnessin’ killings, leavin’ dead bodies in abandoned building* (Mo Be, Easy, 1995).

During my first year of college, I was still working through the trauma of pushout I experienced at 1488 Douglas Street and attempting to make sense of the dysfunction I had been exposed to throughout my childhood. I was at the same time figuring out who was supporting me and who was rejecting me. The attacks that were made against me were vicious, just like those that were made against Tupac; frequently, people believed the other people before they believed me. I became obsessed with Tupac at a young age because I believed that my life and my story were connected to the story he had to tell and the story that I now tell. Tupac, a young Black male, was brought up by other members of his family because his mother was a junkie and lacked the ability to care for him properly. My mother could have as well been his mother. She was a junkie and could not provide a stable and loving home for me.

While he was trying to figure out who he was in this world, Tupac was haphazardly forced to become an adult and was deprived of the opportunity to enjoy the carefree days of his childhood. My identity as a Black girl was still a mystery to me at the time. I wanted to gain an understanding of how my voice functioned in various locations throughout my world at the time. A portion of me was trying to figure out who was supporting me and who was rejecting me. In the same way as Tupac, I had just arrived at college, which served as my recording studio.
During my first week there, I was confronted with the unsettling truth that my battle had not yet been won on any front, including the physical, the mental, or the emotional ones. When all I could do was think about the negative elements of my situations, it was extremely difficult to look for the positive aspects in life. Most of my life was a fight, and it was a bad fight; I always had the impression that the world being against me was deeply engrained in my very being. My mantra was “the world is against me,” but as I (re)flect on these journal entries, I (re)alize that there were people in my life who were there as support systems and who were trying to get me to see that, in some (re)spects, it was not just me against the world.

I now recognize Ms. Shabazz was still supporting and providing me past my high school experiences. As she stated back when I was 14 years old, her commitment to me was for a lifetime and would not stop. Before school even started, she had my dorm room furnished, I had fresh new shoes and clothes, and she gave me 100 dollars for groceries. She was the first positive relationship that I experienced that was constant and consistent. Now Puffy and Biggie’s relationship at the time of Tupac’s shooting was different, but the one area that is similar is Tupac thought that they were his support system.

However, my dealings with the dean of students gave me a clear understanding of the power dynamics that are in place within educational systems. Even though the white girl who I helped was fighting, she was not sent to the dean’s office as I was. This demonstrates how racism played a significant role in the dean of students’ decision regarding me. As a result of the interaction that the dean had with me, he came to the conclusion that it was acceptable for him to label me and predict what kind of student I would be at the institution. The dean of students who sent a clear (re)minder that he had the authority to kick me out of school was yet another instance of the overt control over my Black life within the context of the educational system.
Furthermore, just like Tupac, there were those who attempted to control his actions and dictate how he should behave within the framework of the rap world’s system. Tupac and I had shared parallel stories since the education systems made sure to control the actions I took and the voices we used. Regulation is defined as “controlling by rule, subject to restrictions, invoking a rule, including sanction, reward, and punishment,” according to research conducted by Lisa Delpit (Gore, 1991, p. 180). If I had behaved like Tupac and followed the rules, my punishment would not have been expulsion or being pushed out.

*Don’t ever change, keep your essence. The people and the politics that we address are where the power lies* (Mo be, Easy, 1995). As I (re)flect on this memo entry, I realize that, like Tupac, I used to carry a 9mm gun, and that was education. I gradually came to the (re)alization that education would be my weapon of escape from the ghetto, which pitted me against the rest of the world. I was attempting to make sense of power dynamics within the context of the educational system, the structure of families, and the dorms. The overwhelming majority of what was going on was that these institutions wanted me to assimilate to their dominant culture.

Nevertheless, much like Tupac, I was fighting against the system, which meant that it was essentially just me versus the rest of the world. I was not going to conduct myself in the conventional manner, which included keeping quiet about who was involved in the altercation in the residence halls; I was also not going to submit to the authority of the dean either. There is an expectation that Black people will assimilate to the culture of power, the workplace, or the academic institutions; this expectation creates a space in which Black people’s voices are muted (Delpit, 1988).

Mini, Sax, and Kevon were three people who had a significant impact and influence on me while I was in college. I was still trying to convince the little Ashá inside of me that it wasn’t
Ashá against the world. However, because of the generational traumas I had with my family and other people I felt I could trust, trust remained a challenge for me. Even though Mini, Sax, and Kevon were trustworthy and constant sources of support in my life, I still had trouble trusting people. At times, I still felt as if it was Ashá against the world. Just like Tupac, I was learning how to process the demons of mistrust from those who I should have naturally been able to trust. During my time at college, Mini, Sax, and Kevon served as guides who helped me comprehend the theme of needing assistance while navigating the challenging educational environment. Thanks to their assistance, I learned how to trust other people and how to look for support from others who could help me.

In my life, three Black men who were in upperclassman roles demonstrated to me what positive Black males should be and what they should look like. The fact that my father was never present in my life is something I often (re)flect on. The life of my grandfather Matt was a supportive figure in our family’s life, but he passed away, and when I was young, he did not have the capacity to support me as he was often plagued with illness. Like Tupac’s story, there was a trio with him who were identified as associates, but my trio were not my associates—they were my support system and family. They would invite me to their dorm room to study for tests, they would eat lunch with me on campus, and whenever they went out to parties while we were in college, they brought me with them. They ensured that I arrived at the party and returned home without incident after it.

The lesson I learned from them was that even if I felt the world was against me, they had me—trust and believe they had me the whole time. The TRIO reminded me of Tupac’s lyrics *Remember one thing. Through every dark night, there’s a bright day after that. So no matter how hard it get, stick your chest out. Keep your head up, and handle it* (Mo be, Easy, 1995). My dark
days were brighter because of them, and because of their consistent love and support and pushing me into who I was to become. Within the context of this critical incident, the following four recurring themes appeared: racism, labeling, needing assistance, and being pushed out.

**Critical Incident #7: The Rules of This World**

If I ruled the world, imagine that I’d free all my sons, I love ‘em love ‘em baby Black diamonds and pearls. Could it be, if you could be mine we’d both shine If I ruled the world. Still livin’ for today, in these last days and time

(Smith & Trackmasters, 1996)

**Memo Entry 7: September 8, 1996**

**The Memo: If I Ruled The World.**

Yo, journal it’s the second month of school and so much is going on. First things first, my cousin called me and told me that child protective services had been up to my granny’s house a few times. My cousin told me that the police were looking for my mom and aunt. I am not writing down why they are looking for them in case the police come to my dorm asking me questions. My cousin said that CPS is really looking at taking everyone out of the house. He told me that granny had something called dementia. He said she was losing her mind and had short-term memory. He also said granny would wake up in the middle of the night or even during the day and just leave the house on foot. They found her the other day about a mile away from the house. I am not sure what to do, all I know is I am not going up to 1488 Douglas Street. Journal, I am sad about my grandmother. She is all I really know as a mother, but I can’t go to that house.

Anyway, journal things got a little crazy today. I was in the multicultural office. The university hired three new Black employees. It is so cool to see people who look like you are working on campus. This is the first time I have seen people who look like me on this campus as a matter of fact that are professionals. I still have not met a Black professor. I wish in high school I would have had a Black teacher. Anyway, while I was in the multicultural center, this girl was
in there that I didn’t care too much for. She started running her mouth. I ran up on her and asked her who she was talking to. I made sure to let her know she wasn’t talking to me. We started to lock up to fight and then this tall Black man walked up and said, “Hey, hey hey ladies how about y’all come to my office? I just looked and that girl said she actually had to go to class. Dr. Harold told me to come to his office. So I went. I was pretty nervous because I was sure I was going to get into trouble for talking loudly and almost getting into a fight. Dr. Harold said, “Young lady what’s your name?” I told him Ashá. He asked how I spelled my name. I told him Ashá with an accent mark over the last a. Which makes me Ashá.

He asked do you know what your name means?” I looked at him and rolled my eyes. Of course, I know what my name means. It means hope and life. My granny said I will bring hope and life to this world. That’s why she gave me that name. He said, “Young Black queen, it’s time to walk into your full capacity then. I have a job in my office to work the front desk and I would like to hire you.” I looked at him and said, “are you for real? I mean I just almost got into a fight in your office. He said that didn’t matter to him. He told me that he believed I could rule the world one day. I asked if he listened to Nas the rapper. He sounded like he knew the lyrics. We laughed. He said you start tomorrow. Be here after your first class. I saw letters that and two a’s and a weird circle shape in the middle on his desk, and a picture with men that had on Black and gold. I asked him what that was. He said, “Have you heard of the oldest and the coldest fraternity in the world?” I said no. He said have you heard about sororities?’ I told him Ms. Shabazz told me about a sorority when I was younger. He asked if I wanted to join one. He told me his wife was in a sorority and their founders were school teachers and she was going to see if any girls were interested in joining. I told him I was not sure about that, but I would think about it. I left Dr. Harold’s office was like he’s a pretty cool guy. He is the man version of Ms. Shabazz from
the community center. I left his office and headed to my house. I moved off campus this year, well let’s just say the dorms said I couldn’t live there anymore because they felt my friends and I were too rowdy. So me and my rowdy friends got a house on 36th Street. Our house be so live. We have the best parties.

Journal, I forgot to mention fall semester is a little different. Mini graduated and moved back to Cali. I miss the big brother, but he’s only a phone call away. I hope he broke up with that crazy girl. Me and Sax didn’t like that girl. Well, I think she was a little coco for coco puffs. Ha ha!

So Journal, this shit just got real last night. One of the football players invited these broads over that I do not get down with to our house for the party. So when I saw them, I fought them on sight. I told the white girl Sally girl if you don’t get the hell up outta here I will run your face to the ground. She popped off and said, well I was invited here. I said well you have been uninvited so roll the fuck out. She got in my face and hit that broad in the face. Her girls hopped out of the car and jumped me. The player that brought them sat there and let them jump me. That nigga was whack for that. Amway, one of my girls heard what was going on and told my other girls to come outside. They got those girls off and me and we rolled them broads. The police came but we were in the house. As matter of fact I was chilling with #88 straight to the league on the couch. That was the dude I kinda messed with. So he told me to just chill so I did. The police asked us what happened, and you already know I wasn’t saying nothing. Because baby snitches get stitches.

Well the next morning at school, the dean of students called me and left a voicemail. I was told I had to be in his office first thing in the morning. I was supposed to go to work in Dr. Harold’s office. The dean of students said I had to come to his office first. So I went into his
office and Dr. Harold was there with the dean of students. In my mind I thought oh no this is another set up. I was about to be in trouble because the dean of students said I couldn’t have any more fights on campus. But the fight was off campus. How he know what happened, was what I was thinking. He said, Ashá I heard there was a fight at your house last night. I looked at the dean and said, I don’t know what you are talking about. Who fought? He said, Ashá don’t the police report says you hit a girl. She wants to press charges against you. He said, Ashá I have told you before I have the power to put you out of school. I was like yeah I know you always remind me of that ALL the time. The dean said that I was going to be referred to the courts, and depending on what happened there would determine what happened with my student status.

Dr. Harold and I left the dean’s office. Dr. Harold looked at me and said, “Ashá why are you fighting this much? Tell me what’s going on with you.” I wasn’t telling Dr. H nothing especially with the white man possibly nearby. I didn’t trust him. Journal, I don’t even know Dr. H that well to be tellin him my business.

Wednesday, October 23, 1996

Journal, I had court today and that junk was wild. So, Sally that white girl came, and she testified against me and told the judge that I invited her to my house and then beat her up for no reason. Her parents had a gang of money so she had paid an attorney. Her family was well connected to the community. All I had was a public defender and the truth. It was my turn to take the stand, I told the judge what happened from my side of the story. Her friends then testified. My friends took the stand and told their side of the story. The judge pulled my attorney and her attorney up to his desk. My attorney came back and told me, Ashá its not looking good. I am going to be real with you. You are Black in a white justice system. These things never go well for Black people. My mind was racing. I worked too hard to get to college. I couldn’t go to jail
and I couldn’t have a criminal record. I am different, journal I am not like the rest of my family. Finally, there was a witness I didn’t know about, the white lady who lived next door. She took the stand and I was shook. I had no clue what she was about to say. She told the judge that she overheard the whole altercation, and she said she heard me tell Sally that she needed to leave. She also overheard Sally and her friends talking after the fight when they called the police. She told the judge the girls said they were going to make up a story that they were invited and then jumped by the residents in the home. The white lady said she could not stand by and watch a young lady like me who had struggles lose a battle that she didn’t create on her own. What was that white woman’s real motive? White people are just not kind to Black folks without wanting something. Journal, I fought hard to hold back my tears because I knew I didn’t start that fight.

The judge made a decision, he said I had to do 50 hours of community service, and I had to go to anger management, and I had to be on court probation for one year with no fights at all. As the judge read the outcome, I looked back and saw the dean of students, Ms. Shabazz, and Dr. Harold, the director of Upward Bound, and CP my English professor and some of the boys on the football team. I took a deep breath and thought to myself what if that white lady didn’t testify what would have been my fate? Anyway journal, I can’t use my hands to fight anymore I got a find another way to do this thing. I am not built for jail. I am not 1488 Douglas Street. Journal, if I had any kind of power in this world. I would help Black girls like me. I have been through a lot and I am only 19-years old.

Mentor Snapshot: Dr. Harold (Dr. H).

My time in college in my early 20s was profoundly shaped by a mentor by the name of Dr. Harold, also referred to as Dr. H. Weber State University hired Dr. H to the position of director of diversity and student programs. Dr. H stood at a height of 6’4”—a tall Black man
with dark skin who was from the South. Dr. H always had a smile on his face when he spoke with me. Except for when he had to say something that I might not want to hear, he would still smile and say what needed to be said in love with a stern expression.

The self-assurance that Dr. H exuded was out of this world, and he always wore vibrant socks. He was the first Black man I met at the university who was not involved with the football team or any other sport-related activity. Because of his incredible intelligence, Dr. H was able to use words that I had never before heard in my life. Words like curriculum, pedagogies, and critical thinking were common in his vocabulary. At that point in time, I did not have these words in my vocabulary. Nevertheless, Dr. H never failed to address me on a higher level. I had to inquire about the meaning of things quite frequently, and he would always respond with a smile and the phrase “Oh, Ashá, you will understand one day.”

In the many times that I visited his office, we discussed the topics of who I was, where I was going, and who I would eventually become. Dr. H made the decision to disregard my anger as well as the opinions of other students and administrators regarding me. Dr. H was always good at reminding me that, “It is not important what other people have to say about you; what matters is how you respond to Ashá Jones. What does your name mean?” He assisted me in understanding who I was as a young Black woman. He helped me understand how to navigate spaces where I might encounter resistance and microaggressions. Dr. H was helping me understand the themes of navigating racism and pushout in the higher education system, while at the same time providing me with the assistance I needed to make sure that white administrators did not push me out and force me to drop out of college before I could complete my degree. He was an enormous help.
After I got into an argument in Dr. H’s office area during his first month on campus, he gave me my first job in student affairs on a college campus as a student worker. Dr. H has decided that he would always be there for me, regardless of the circumstances I may have ended up experiencing. Because of the assistance that Dr. H provided, I was able to avoid being labeled as a troublemaker and as someone who was not worthy of being a student at the institution. Dr. H was the first person to initiate a conversation with me about having a connection with God. He shared with me Romans 8:28, a verse from the Bible that has remained one of my favorites throughout the years. *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who[a] have been called according to his purpose* (New International Version, 2011, Romans 8:28). Dr. H explained to me that this scripture would give me the ability to rule over the things that had previously attempted to rule over me. He explained to me that this scripture was talking about purpose, and he frequently prompted me to think about my name and how it relates to purpose. He did this by continually bringing up the meaning of my name in our conversations. It dawned on me just now that he was always assisting me in not forgetting that I am a source of hope and life to Black girls and women in systems of education and society. The most challenging part of my life has been the experiences I’ve had to endure while watching other people I care about go through difficult times as well. Never in my wildest dreams did I think something bad could turn out better for me.

Dr. H always encouraged me to be whoever I wanted to be; he did it with love and care and his support of me as a student was undeniable. He noted during our Zoom interview:

You were pretty straightforward and what you want and when you want it to do and how you want it to progress your profession, supporting you, as a person, I was very rigid. And I challenge you to not just settle, and I think there are some times where I believed in you, before you believed you can do certain things. And that came off as me taking a very hard line and not just accepting the status quo with you. And so, it also meant that I needed to be on my game, it meant I need to be ready to assist you and to guide you, and
develop myself to know how to work with you, as you progress throughout your life and career, I need to make sure that I had an understanding of where I was, and to be self-centered within myself. (Harrold, 2022)

Dr. H’s mentorship with me began 27 years ago at Weber State University and has been the most impactful and insightful relationship I have ever experienced on a college campus. Dr. H pushed me in ways that I said I did not want, but in reality, I needed them and I wanted them. He taught me about boundaries and what trust should feel and look like. Dr. Harold had conversations with me that were uncomfortable. I was used to telling people what I was going to do and how I was going to do it. Growing up without a father was a constant struggle for me, but it was something that I desired. Dr. H provided that in my life by having those tough conversations with me that required me to take responsibility for the things that were within my control. Dr. H taught me the meaning and importance of love. He was a father-figure role for me.

He shared:

In your case, I didn’t treat you the way I want to be treated, I treated you the way you want to be treated. And I think that is unique because sometimes, as a part of our relationship, the greatest struggle you had to overcome was the one within yourself. And sometimes you needed someone to believe in you until you got enough confidence and assurance to affirm that you were doing the right thing. And to affirm that you were good enough. And to confirm that you were headed in the right direction. (Harrold, 2022)

Dr. Harold’s mentorship became the foundation of my understanding of who I was in systems of education, but also who I was in God. Dr. H taught me the importance of having the mentors that I need in my life, not the ones I wanted in life. Dr. H was my prayer warrior, father-figure, and mentor all wrapped up in one, and he understood what I needed rather than what I wanted. Dr. H’s support has helped me to persist during the good and bad times through my journey of becoming a Black girl to a Black woman.
The Music Mentor: If I Ruled the World.

*If I ruled the world, imagine that, I’d free all my sons,* *I love ‘em love ‘em baby* (Smith & Trackmasters, 1996). Kurtis Blow’s album *If I Ruled the World* was initially released in 1985. The year 1996 saw Nas and Lauryn Hill collaborate on a remastering of the track. When Kurtis Blow composed the song, he had the goal of bringing peace to the Black community and breaking the cycle of poverty. In the course of working on the remix, Nas and Lauryn Hill primarily concentrated their attention on the continued existence of inequality and injustice within the Black community. If Nas were in charge of the world, he would make sure that everyone had equal opportunities and that justice prevailed in all situations. The first item on Nas’s agenda was to free people from the shackles imposed by different incarceration systems and methods.

The lyrics of both Kurtis Blow and Nas, as well as those of Lauryn, struck a chord with me as a Black girl struggling to get by in this world, despite the injustices that are pervasive in Black communities while understanding the themes of racism, silencing, and pushout. In these particular memo entries, I am processing the reality that my grandmother was suffering from dementia and Alzheimer’s. During the time that I was processing, my main goal was to keep my cousins and brother from having to go into the child welfare system. I (re)called that one of the people who had been the most supportive of me throughout my academic career had recently completed college and moved back to their home state of California.

Therefore, if I were to rule the world, I would be exempt from the injustices that I have experienced within the context of my educational system, the structure of my family, and the legal system. My ultimate objective was to achieve freedom from unfair systems that were not broken but rather built in that manner. If I were to conquer the world, I would be able to use
music as a guide to set myself and others free. Music was one of my primary influences growing up. Kurtis Blow, Nas, and Lauryn Hill made it possible for me to release my burdens or discuss as a guide the ways in which I could liberate myself and others through the lyrics. If I ruled the world and gave myself the authorization to test my own boundaries in order to make room for my own liberation as a Black girl, then I would not have to deal with the trauma caused by institutional racism.

If I had control of the world, I could have avoided having the white woman serve as my witness. When I told my side of the story, if I had ruled the world, the judge and dean of students would have believed my story the very first time I told it. If I ruled the world, I would make sure that my grandmother did not have dementia. If I ruled the world, I would make sure that my mother did not have to go to prison. If I ruled the world, I would make sure that none of my cousins or siblings ever had to interact with the child welfare system. If Ashá were to become the ruler of the world, all Black girls and women would be granted their freedom, and they would no longer be required to fight for their freedom and other Black girls and women.

Mentor Snapshot: Ms. Shabazz.

When I think about the mentorship I received from Ms. Shabazz through the lens of Nas’s lyrics, I (re)alize what he meant when he said that if he ruled the world, he would set all of his sons free. Part of my story is that I was seeking refuge in freedom from systems of dysfunction in my life and in systems of education.

When I tried to tell my story to the judge and jury, they didn’t believe me, and I found that there were chains still in place that surrounded me. I told the judge that Sally and her friends had come to my house without my invitation when we were in court for the fight. I am the person who lives at the address in question. The judge did not believe me. My sentence would have
been different if the white lady who lived next door to us had not testified against Sally and her crew. I was Black, and she was white; however, the voices of the other people in the courtroom carried more weight than mine did.

Ms. Shabazz put a lot of effort into teaching me how to make the most of my voice so that it could be heard by others. This was one of the areas in which she helped me to navigate. She took the time to demonstrate to me how to use my hands in a non-physical manner and in a way that would allow others to hear what I had to say. She revealed that:

Early on, you know, you wanting to fight and do all of that. So try to calm you down and let you know there’s a better way to do it. Other than a physical fight, you know, let’s have a conversation. Let’s bring someone else in that is trusted to be a part of those conversations. (Shabazz, 2022)

Ms. Shabazz understood that I was fighting not only to have my voice heard, but also for people to believe me and what I had to say. As a Black girl entering Black womanhood, I was fighting for people not to hear me but to see me. I wanted people to see who Ashá was at my core; I was not angry. I wanted my voice to be heard. I wanted guidance. I wanted people to believe me, and Ms. Shabazz took on that role. Her role as a mentor was to make sure that my voice was heard, validated, and trusted as a Black girl in the rooms I entered. Ms. Shabazz explained:

It was easy for people in positions of leadership not to accept responsibility for the things that took place. So they would always, I believe, look to the most vulnerable person to be the ones who are not willing to look at the whole story, look at both sides of the story. (Shabazz, 2022)

Ms. Shabazz recognized that my judgment and decisions about me were frequently predetermined by my lived experiences and the environments I was navigating. Her mentorship provided a soft place for me to land. Her support gave me a trusted person to whom I could explain my story and who would then advocate for me. As Ms. Shabazz expounded on her
mentorship with me, she often found herself in rooms with leaders where she became my voice, advocate, and cultural broker.

So if anything happened, it must have been your fault, you must have done something kind of thing. And that I would be advocating on the other side. But wait a minute, let’s look at the whole story. You know what happened, who did it, could have been handled differently. And most of the time, it wasn’t handled; I kind of felt that people had in their minds what they were going to do from the beginning. (Shabazz, 2022)

Ms. Shabazz was teaching me how I could rule the world with my voice while also assisting me to navigate the political structures of institutionalized racism. She was aware that I was seeking liberation, and she was doing so while simultaneously instructing me how to do this for myself.

Within the context of this critical incident, the following four recurring themes appeared: racism, labeling, needing assistance, and being pushed out.

Critical Incident #8: Playa You Can’t Hold Me

Can’t nobody take my pride
Can’t nobody hold me down, oh, no
I got to keep on movin (Combs et al., 1997)

The Memo: Can’t Nobody Hold Me Down

Memo Entry 8: November 2, 1996,

Yo, journal, I saw these Black girls with blue and yellow on doing these dances in a line in the courtyard. They had a table set up and there were lots of Black girls going up to it. I remember Ms. Shabazz told me in high school about Black sororities, but I didn’t think we would have one at our school because mostly white people are here. There were some white girls who went to the table. Journal white folks don’t want us to have nothing. They had white sororities on campus they white tails need to go on over there. Ha ha. Journal I make myself laugh. Anyway, I went up to the table and I asked some questions. They told me that you get to do community service and give back to Black high school girls. I was like that’s so cool, and
they said that if we get accepted we get to do some dances in a line with them. Oh and Journal Dr. H’s wife was there, she is a part of that sorority. Dr. H’s wife is so nice. She talked to me today, and she asked me Ashá why you sagging your pants? I just laughed. She told me that if I joined that I would have to wear a dress sometimes. Journal, I ain’t wearing no dress. That’s stupid. Anyway, I am going to think about it. They have some sort of meeting for people who want to know more tonight at 7:22 in a room by the bowling alley on campus. I think I am gonna go to see what they are talking about. Alright, journal I have an early morning. I am out.

Memo entry: December 6, 1996

Journal, my cousin called me today and she let me know that grandpa Tre had a heart attack today and died. Grandpa Tre’s death hit me hard journal. Grandpa Tre was mean to me a lot of times. He beat me a lot growing up. He called me dumb bitches and would always say I ain’t shit. But he’s my grandpa and I am supposed to be sad, right? My family is so crazy. I could hear my Aunt Ginn in that background yelling, and saying why you call that ugly fat bitch don’t nobody care about her. Yo, journal I can’t stand my aunt Ginn. She is so crazy. She was probably high as a kite. She was probably sad because Grandpa Tre was her daddy and not grandpa Matt. I wonder how my granny kept up with them two men, and the boyfriends she had. I found some articles in a photo album where these two women cut my granny because she was messing with one of their men. My granny is a g. Two men living with her, and she had other men. My cousin also told me my granny’s memory is getting worse. The doctors say that dementia is a lot to handle. My cousin said all that liquor my granny used to drink probably made her lose her mind. I don’t know, but I don’t want to have to go to 1488 Douglas Street, but I need to go check on my granny and my cousins. Alright, journal. I hit you up later. I gotta go to the crazy house.
Memo entry: Saturday, March 3, 1997, 6:33 a.m.

Yo journal, you won’t believe this. I am a sorority girl now. I can’t believe it. I can’t believe it. Me and my sisters crossed the burning sands last night at 2:22 a.m., and our big sisters accepted us. I have seven new sisters, a Kendra, Keira, Ava, Nadia, Sadia, Shannel, and Belle. Belle is my favorite out of all my line sisters. She is my link. We are the 7 and 8 on the line. They said next week at school we have get to have a coming out show. I can’t wait to wear my letters on campus. They said we even get to travel to Phoenix for a sorority conference. This will be my second time going out of the state of Utah. Eeeks, journal I am a sorority girl now.

Journal, I have been thinking about something. I want to start a step team for Black girls in the community. I think I could help them. Kinda of like how Ms. Shabazz helped me. I am gonna ask my line sisters if they want to help me. Journal, I have been up all night. I am gonna get some rest. We are going to them pretty boys party tonight. They have the cutest boys in their fraternity. Plus their fraternity was founded in Indiana just like mine. We could have an Indiana love story. Alright, journal I am out.

Memo entry: Wednesday, November 12, 1997, 9:49 p.m.

Journal, today was supposed to be great because we were celebrating our first founders’ day as members of the sorority. Our sorority turned 75 years old today. 75 years ago seven school teachers created an amazing organization dedicated to service and the progress of others. Anyway, Happy Founders’ Day to us. My heart is broken, Sax called us and told us we all needed to meet up at his place. He had some news to tell us. So, we all headed over there. When he got there, he let us know Mini died. He got sick about three weeks ago and didn’t recover. I am so mad journal. Mini told me he would always be here. Sax said, God needed him more. That’s crazy why would God need him more than me. I am so angry. He promised he would
always be here. Journal, I don’t understand. Oh yeah, my cousin called and said child welfare
people was back at granny’s house this week. She said, granny was still leaving the house in the
middle of the night wandering. She also said, my aunt Fefe got locked up this week for a drug
violation. I am gonna head out journal. I don’t feel like talking much tonight.

Memo entry: Thursday, December 11, 1997, 11:53 p.m.

Yo, Journal you won’t believe what happened today. I was out with Justice and Candance
and we were having so much fun. The boy I vibe with was all in my face tonight, but I told him I
wasn’t interested because I knew he was messing with this white girl on the soccer team. I told
him boy you can’t play a playa and you definitely can’t hold me down. HA HA, but that boy is
fine is all get out. Hey, this white lady named Ms. Nadine called me. She said that she was from
child welfare services. She told me that my cousins and brother had been taken to child
protective services and that I was listed as the closest relative. She asked me if I wanted custody
of my brother and my cousins. Custody I didn’t even know what that meant, I was only 20-years
old. Journal, I live in a house with three other girls. Where are they going to stay? What am I
going to do? I gotta call Dr. Harold and the dean of students. I gotta call Ms. Shabazz. I know
they will help me. I can’t let my family go to the system. Journal, I will hit you tomorrow after I
get some more information. Shit, this is crazy. I hate 1488 Douglas Street. I don’t want to go
there.

Friday, December 12, 1997, 3:45 p.m.

Hey, Journal! Dr. H went with me to the office of child protective services to see what we
could do with my family. Oh, the dean of students said he couldn’t come with us to the meeting.
He said he would check in with Dr. H. I don’t even know why I called the dean because that
white man didn’t give two shits about me. Anyway, Journal. The lady explained that my mom
and aunt got caught up on some drug charges and robbery charges and most likely going back to prison because they violated their probation. She told me that my granny was being moved to a nursing home. Ms. Nadine said they were letting my cousins stay because my grandpa Tre was taking care of them, but there was no one to take care of them now. Because he passed away. She said we had a court hearing next week. She let me know they would need to come to my house and check it out, and that I needed to go to the welfare department to get food stamps, and medical insurance for my brother. She told me once I got custody of my brother I would need to find a new place to live within 90 days. Journal I don’t even know if the landlord will let me out.

Ooo, Journal, if she is coming over, I gotta clear all that liquor out of our house. The homies have a lot of liquor at the house. Anyway, Dr. H told me he would help me with everything. Dr. H had to go to a meeting back on campus. So he left, and I went home and called the homies on the football team. I called Justice and let her know what was going on. She told me we could hang out later. She made me feel better. I love my homegirl. We gone be friends for life. I called Eugene, Kane Smoke, Christopher, and Chance, PD, and told them what was going on. Eugene said, “Don’t worry Ashá we got you. We family. I called Sax and let him know what was going on. He said, “Remember what Mini told you freshman year. We got you freshman. You are a Weber girl. We are family” Man, the WSU boys be riding for ya girl. On a side note journal, they don’t let me talk to any of the recruits, and every time I like someone they shut it down. Them boys be blocking my game. HA HA! Journal, all jokes aside. I love them, boys. Alright, journal I am out. I will hit you later.

Memo entry: Tuesday, December 16, 1997, 5:45 p.m.

Well, Journal, the courtroom was wild today. They brought my mom and my brother’s dad from the prison to the hearing. My mom was dressed in an orange jumpsuit. It is the first
time I had seen her in about a year. She was never home when I had to go to 1488 Douglas Street. Anyway she went off in court when they told her that she was losing all of her rights as a parent. She started yelling and screaming. She turned to me and said, “Fuck you Ashá. I never wanted you. You are trash and you should have died at birth.” You already know my granny raised a “g.” I just looked at her and did not say anything. The judge asked me if I needed a break. I told the judge and the attorneys I needed to get some water. Dr. H came out into the hallway, and he just gave me a hug. I refused to cry. I’m a soldier journal. Soldiers don’t cry. It was time to go back in and this time I had to face Mr. Cee my brother’s dad. Journal, these people are nuts. Mr. Cee and my mom couldn’t be in the courtroom at the same time. Mr. Cee didn’t yell, he didn’t even scream. The judge told him he was losing all parental rights, and he said okay and asked if he could be taken out. The judge told me that I was being granted full custody of my brother, but my other cousins had to go to foster care until I could get my living situation figured out. However, he said my great grandma’s niece that lived in New York was gonna take Cece. My cousins Tobias and Bebe were going into foster systems that allowed you to get your own apartments because they were going to emancipate them at 17. My cousin Dante had some different issues and would only be allowed to come with me on weekends until we could get a better living situation. Damn, journal this is all my fault I was supposed to keep my family together.

Dr. H told me that he was going to help me with all the welfare paperwork and he would help me find new housing. Journal, how am I gonna raise a 9-year-old sibling full-time and take care of my cousin Dante on the weekends? Journal will I still get a full college experience? Journal this is my lot. So I gotta do what I gotta do.
Music Mentor Snapshot: Can’t Nobody Take My Pride.

I will never forget when this album dropped; the song was fresh and it was dope. The song was amazing on so many different levels because of the beat, lyrics, and music video. The song is a mashup of several of the artist’s earlier singles, the most noticeable of which is a slowed-down rhythm track sampling from *The Message*, performed by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. The chorus of this track is sampled from “Break My Stride,” a single released by Matthew Wilder in 1983 that reached number five on the Billboard Hot 100 chart. In addition, the song includes a sample of the opening drums from Michael Jackson’s 1979 single “Rock with You” (Serrano, 2015).

The song was genius, but more than that, the lyrics (re)sonated with me because I was in a phase where the things of life could have held me down. In the music video’s opening, classical music is playing, and Sean “Puffy” Combs is in his bed having a dream that he is underwater drowning; you see hands reaching out to help him out of the water and some hands pushing him under the water. The lyrics of the song (re)presented a symbol that he was letting people know that he was a strong person and nothing could break him. On the other hand, the song was an illustration of the concept of being suppressed through silence and in need of assistance. According to what was described in the dream, there were hands that were trying to force him out of the room, but there were also hands that were trying to assist him. Like Puffy in the video, there were a lot of hands that pushed me out, but there were hands that pulled me up and helped me get out of the educational complex.

The song lyrics “*Can’t nobody take my pride. Can’t nobody hold me down, oh, no. I got to keep on movin’*” (Combs et al., 1997) were the ones that first (re)sonated with me. Just like Puffy in the video, I was underwater with all of the things I was facing in my junior year of
college. Furthermore, I was dealing with a loss yet again: My grandmother had dementia, which would eventually lead to Alzheimer’s disease, and my aunt was moving her to a nursing home 45 miles south of where we lived. I was still dealing with verbal and mental abuse from my aunt. I (re)alized that my aunt could not hold me down. I was going to keep moving forward no matter what I experienced from her and life. My grandfather passed away; it was a dysfunctional (re)lationship with him in so many ways because, like the song’s lyrics said, “Don’t push us, ‘cause we’re close to the edge. We’re tryin, not to lose our heads, a-hah-hah, hah, hah” (Combs, et al., 1997). I was being pushed close to the edge by thoughts that ran through my head but were so very present. I was literally and figuratively trying not to lose my head about the thoughts around my grandfather. His physical and mental abuse pushed me over the edge at that house on Douglas Street.

I found something greater than myself and would give me sisterhood by joining Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Incorporated. There was a missing piece to the puzzle of my life, and it was family, one that stood together through thick and thin. My line sisters and I (re)mixed the song we would always sing before we had to do stuff for our sorority. We would sing, “Can’t nobody break our line, can’t nobody hold us down, oh no we Xi Tau for life.” Xi Tau was our chapter and Sigma Gamma Rho was our new life. We committed to something we would be a part of for a lifetime, and we went through some “stuff” together.” My line sisters and I faced break-ups together, folks questioning who we were in the sorority, other sorority girls hating on us, and still trying to figure out who we were as women.

Broken glass everywhere (Combs et al., 1997). The death angel paid another visit to my life three months after my grandfather died; I finally understood the death of my grandfather. Then I was hit with the news that Mini passed away. I had just saw Mini at a football game three
weeks before in California. His death placed me back under the water where I felt I was drowning. As the song’s lyrics stated, there was broken glass everywhere. My life was constantly figuring out how to pick up the broken pieces of my life. I felt as though glass just continued to break around me. Mini’s impact on my life been so influential since my freshman year, and I was trying to understand how to maintain the impact that now felt like broken glass again.

My memo entry about my family members going to the child protective services explains how I ingested and divulged complex information that was not easy to understand and yet quite embarrassing in some ways. I had to share with my mentors and friends just how dysfunctional things were for me, while also coming to terms with explaining to them how I had been drowning in dysfunction for years. It became clear to me that I was drowning due to my lived experiences of surviving being surrounded by whiteness in systems of education, while understanding the foundations of the systems were not going to be fixed anytime soon.

I had to (re)calibrate because my life would look very different moving forward, and I had to (re)gain control over what my new life would look like. Can’t nobody take my pride was part of the song’s chorus, but I finally (re)alized that my pride was in the way, and I was going to need help.

Dr. H, my line sisters, Justice, the WSU boys, and Ms. Shabazz were the ones pulling me out of the water and would be the ones who would not allow me to drown. The theme of needing assistance showed up as my mentors assisted me in navigating the path of life and death. They were my life rafts. Dr. H and Ms. Shabazz helped me get furniture for my apartment and went to every appointment with me to obtain medical insurance, food stamps, and financial benefits for my brother. When I communicated with my line sisters about what was going on with my family and that my brother was coming to live with me, they got together and came up with $922.00;
that money they gave me paid for my rental deposit and the first month’s rent. It provided my brother with his own room for the first time in his life. Justice told me she would help me with my brother when she was in town. Justice was on the track team, and December was a busy month for indoor track.

However, it was the fact that she gave me her word, and I knew she would keep it. The WSU boys got money to use at the bookstore; they got my brother a bunch of gear out of the bookstore, so that we had Christmas presents for him that year. Eugene agreed to give him haircuts twice a month. Christopher’s mom sent me a box of clothes for him for Christmas. Kane Smoke told me he would help me get him to football practices. PD lived by me, so when I worked nights for Delta Airlines, he would let my brother come over and help him with his homework.

My WSU family and community taught me that even with broken glass, I could put my pride aside, that I was not going to lose my head, and that I was going to keep it moving because I could not be stopped. I would not drown because they had me. They taught me that glass breaks. There are times that the glass can be (re)placed, and there are times when you must get new glass.

**Mentor Snapshot: Dr. H.**

Dr. H understood the politics and analytics of higher education, racism, and power structures. A Black girl, Dr. H said, challenged the models of how I was handled at the college and within the judicial system. He was the support system in my community that had the authority to confront systems of power and oppression to create change. Dr. H taught me that representation matters. He could connect with because he was Black man, not a Black woman; thus, he included his wife as part of my mentorship experience, and because of her, I was able to
join my sorority. Self-preservation for me was to throw my hands up and hit or throw my hands up and block the hit, but Dr. H showed me how I could take my brokenness and my lived experiences and turn them into my testimony, which is now my research. He became my advocate so that I did not have to use my hands to fight, but rather use my hands to write in order to tear down white power structures in education.

As I explained earlier, Dr. H taught me the importance of Romans 8:28 and that everything I experienced would work out for my good. Dr. H taught me that I could use my mother’s bad experiences and turn them into good ones for my brother. During our interview, he said, “You were trying to balance that with trying to provide a level of stability for your siblings and other members of your family.” He was there for me through this challenging period in my life, loving me, rocking by my side, and even essentially carrying me at Weber State University. Dr. H has not left my side; it has been 27 years, and he is still holding me down. As Puff said, I go to keep on movin (Combs, et al., 1997). The themes of needing assistance, pushout, and silence were present in the context of this critical incident.

**Critical Incident #9: Somebody Is Really Watching Over Me**

**The Memo: Angels Watching Over Me.**

**Memo Entry 9: Saturday, June 26, 1999**

Yo journal, I am kind of sad, Dr. H got a new job at another university and he won’t be there for my senior year, but he said he will keep in contact with me. Well journal, something really cool happened you know how I have been going to church with JC and her sister Kwayera for the last year. It has been really cool learning about God and his son Jesus. I have learned over the last year that God sent his son to die for me and He takes all my burdens. I also go to church with Dr. sometimes and his church is cool, but all the people are like 100 years old. But the 2nd
Baptist Church be poppin. All the Black students from Weber go there. They have fish frys for us once a month. That fish be so good. To be honest I really only started coming to church because of the free fish. They also taught us that Jesus feed the 5000 people with two fish and ten loaves of bread. I think it was ten loaves. I probably should read more about that. However, it’s really cool and I like going to church there. I learn lots of things about God. The young adult pastor is cool. We call him Pastor Dre because he can mix music and play the drums. He’s really cool he used to be Muslim but converted to become Christian. He’s kind of mean though. If we don’t do our homework before Sunday School he be yelling at us. I like how he teaches us. He uses music we listen to and relates it back to the scriptures. Some of the older people at church don’t like his style of teaching, but yo I love it. I sometimes just have to remember I am at church and I can’t stay the bad words. HA HA! Journal, I think I am going to accept Christ tomorrow. I want to be baptized and have a forever home with God. I think I am gonna do it. I will let you know tomorrow. Good night, journal. Hit you up later.

Sunday, June 27, 1999

Journal, OMG! I did it. I accepted God as my Lord and savior. They sang a song at church today, and the lyrics said:

Through danger seen and unseen. There’s protection all around. Under the refuge of God’s wings. Security is found. For there are angels watchin’ you. To keep you in all of your ways. Keeping you from stumbling, so don’t be afraid. God’s appointed angels, watching over me. Angels watchin’ over me…. Angel watching over me Angel watching over me, yeah. (Smallwood, 2001)

Journal, can you believe it there are angels that watch over me? I wonder if Mini is one of the angels that watch over me. I remember Mini would talk to me about God. I wish he was here. I am sure he would have said, “See freshmen, we got you.” Oh yeah, my mom was in Ogden this week. She’s out of jail. She gave me a Bible for my birthday. Funny thing is she didn’t say happy
birthday, or I love you. And she signed the inside of the bible from her government name not mom. That lady is so strange. Journal, I am so excited about this walk with Christ. I think the pastor said I am going to get baptized next week or the week after. Journal, I can’t believe it. I am now a child of God.

*Memo entry: May 3, 2000*

God, I can’t believe it. I am graduating college in two days. I am the first person to graduate college. This is so wild. Thank you for helping me get that waiver from Math. I almost was not going to graduate because of not passing Math 101. God, your angels were really watching over me. I am beyond thankful. EEEKS, I am gonna be a college grad. I am so excited Christopher’s mom is having a BBQ for us this Saturday. She is paying for everything. I love Ms. Tina. Yo she has been looking out for me ever since Christopher came to Weber. So on Friday, at graduation, it’s going to be me, Christopher, Chance, and PD that will walk together. Kane Smoke and Eugene don’t graduate until next year. God, I thank the angels for watching over me. Thank you to Dr. H and Ms. Shabazz. They really supported ya girl the whole entire 4½ years I was here. I am so thankful you didn’t allow the dean to kick me out of school. God, I thank you for last week to when the university police took me to the campus jail cell holding area because they booted my car when it wasn’t even parked on campus. The campus police officer told me that I have a smart mouth and I need to learn some lessons. All because I asked him why he was taking me in. God, they had me in there for hours, talking about they were going to take me to jail for parking violations. You always send an angel to help me out. I am so thankful Justice got a hold of Ms. Shabazz and told her what was going on with me. God, I just love you and I thank you for my angels that watch over me. Have a good night, God. I love you. Amen.
Friday, May 5, 2000

God, I want to just stop and say thank you. The last 4½ years have been filled with joy and pain, but you God and your angels got me through. During my time in college, I joined a sorority, I was secretary and president of both Sigma Gamma Rho and the Black Student Union. I hosted the first step show on our campus. I started a step team for Black girls in the community called Ladies of Today. I love them, girls. We made up a cool chant that we sing every time they before they would step.

L.O.T. ladies of today Ashá and Neisha breedin steppas all ladies, but believe we don’t play. We setting out shows coast to coast, ya you know that’s for sure. We can lean with it rock with it, drop like it’s how with it, take it to the top with and show don’t stop with it.

God, you couldn’t tell me and them girls nothing. I took those girls to Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Idaho, and the state of Washington. I am so thankful I got to mentor them. Now God, you know some of them kids were mini Ashá’s and I would laugh because God you have great sense of humor.

Dr. H let me create the largest high school conference for Black students. We had over 875 Black students on campus. I wish Dr. H could have been here to watch me walk across the stage. I have a job in the athletic department, as a marketing coordinator. I love love working in the athletic department. Journal, my mom showed up to graduation. She was sober but she was irritated. She came outside from walking she came out too. She wanted to see my little brother. She told my little brother she loved him. She didn’t tell me that. She just said, “Congratulations, Ashá and she left. God, I don’t understand that lady, but oh well. I am excited to hang out with all my friends tonight. Justice is back in town for graduation. We are about to outdance these boys on the football team tonight. I am gonna have fun tonight. I am not gonna
drink, but I am gonna have a ball. So I am asking for forgiveness now. God, thank you for this opportunity. Love you!

**The Music Mentor: The Angels See You.**

When I (re)considered these memos, I was going through a different kind of awakening that was happening to and for me at the same time. As I mentioned in the very first entry of my journal, I did not grow up in a household that regularly attended religious services or discussed God. Everything I knew about God came to me in the beginning from white children who were Mormon in the Utah education system. These children told me that God did not like Black people.

During my junior year of college, Dr. H gave me a scripture to read, and through it, he introduced me to God. From a metaphorical perspective, I was going through the process of being reborn with fresh spiritual DNA. I (re)member Pastor P saying to me right before I was baptized, “The old Ashá is gone, and the new Ashá is here.” When we are born again through faith in Christ, He gives us a new sort of spiritual DNA that made me eager to know more about Him.

In the Bible, the Apostle Paul discussed putting away the old and replacing it with the new. I call this process the (Re)naissance. The (Re)naissance is moving from what is old to what is new. The angels that watched over me allowed me to have something new:

Ephesians 4:22-24, that, regarding your previous way of life, you put off your old self [completely discard your former nature], and be continually renewed in the spirit of your mind [having a fresh, unimpaired mental and spiritual attitude], and put on the new self [the regenerated and renewed nature], created in God’s image, [godlike] in the righteousness and holiness of the truth [living in a way that expresses to God your gratitude for your salvation]. *(Ephesians 4:22-24 (NIV), n.d.)*

God gave me a second chance at life and there was a (re)newal over my life; it made me aware of my position in God and produced a new (re)velation within me. All of these are thanks
to God. Ashá Jones was no longer the young Black girl who had spent her childhood in a trap house, rejected by her mother and never knowing her biological father. I was a Black girl who was guarded by angels, and they watched over me. God adopted me into His family, I became his child, and I would never be rejected by Him.

Bigger than that, I had a God who loved me and who made it possible for me to make the transition from simply surviving to thriving by assigning His angels to keep watch over me. This was a peace that could be mine for the taking, and it came looking for me. For the first time in my life, I was not looking for it. It was looking for me. I was finally able to find a place where I could find my center of joy and peace and experience the love of a father in its purest form. My new relationship with God did not an end to my struggles; more importantly, it opened up for me a fresh perspective on the fact that something more powerful was directing the course of my life. The angels were watching over me. The lyrical content of “angels watching over me” illuminated the concept of needing assistance, while demonstrating that I had a new lease on my life through God. Second, through God, I was shown that I had an additional mentor in my life who would help me navigate the circumstances of my life, regardless of whether they were positive or negative.

**Mentor Snapshot: Dr. H and Ms. Shabazz**

God made a way for me to have a personal encounter with Dr. H during my junior year of college. Through my involvement with the Second Baptist Church, God helped me to understand that I could have a relationship with him. This is yet another confirmation that God has entrusted his angels on earth to watch me. A new perspective on the story of my life, as seen through the eyes of God, was made clear to me, thanks to the assistance of Dr. H, Ms. Shabazz, JC, and her sister.
The angel crew helped me to see that *the wings of loving hands around me so I will not fear. For I can feel the presence covering me. Nothing but angels watching over me. Angels watching over, over, over, over, over, over* (Smallwood, 2001). The angels that God sent to watch over me helped me find my peace and my North star. I am beyond thankful to Dr. H for inviting me to go to church, and I am glad that I let my guard down to accept an invitation to attend church with him and his wife. Dr. H saw who I was in God and used the call on his life to ignite the call on my life. Dr. H’s spiritual insight allowed him to mentor at a higher level.

During our interview, he explained:

> I think in our relationship, even from the beginning, I think that you had a very strong will, a lot of grit and resiliency. But I think that you just needed to have something to center you. And you’re very receptive to your spiritual growth and development and character development. And I think that just accepting the invitation to go to church became a welcome addition because I think it gives you a sense of peace. (Harrold, 2022)

Dr. H was able to get past my tough exterior and connect with me on a deeper level. He knew I was a Black girl who had lived through dysfunctional experiences and was searching for tranquility in my life. His guidance knew that I had been going through a storm for such a long time that he led me to God, and there I found that I could find solace, regardless of the fact I was still in the middle of a storm called life. His guidance demonstrated to me the consistent support I wanted and needed, and he was there to provide assistance as I navigated life both inside and outside of the educational complex. He shared:

> You know, not to get too spiritual, but it became that quiet in the middle of the storm you were going through, not just as a life, not just in life, but also as a first-generation college student adjusting to higher education. As a woman of color, me being a man of color, I think that you know, just how you identify your connection to an organized ministry, an organized denomination, known as Christianity, and attending church gave you a place to center yourself, and just give you a peace in the midst of all the other things that you were dealing with at that point in time. that what we’re doing is much greater than who we currently weren’t that time. (Harrold, 2022)
Dr. H gave me the safe space I needed to grow into the role God had chosen for me in this world. He not only understood my craziness in the midst of my mayhem, but he also realized that I needed and wanted calmness in the eye of the hurricane of my life. The “angels” guarded me and guided me in a new direction in life as I became a new creation in God. The need for help was the recurring theme throughout this critical incident.

The Motto

Critical Incident #10: Wake Up Ashá

Wake up everybody no more sleepin in bed. No more backward thinkin time for thinkin ahead. The world has changed so very much. From what it used to be so. There is so much hatred war an’ poverty. Wake up all the teachers and teach a new way. Maybe then they’ll listen to whatcha have to say. Cause they’re the ones who’s coming up and the world is in their hands. When you teach the children teach em the very best you can. The world won’t get no better if we just let it be. The world won’t get no better we gotta change it yeah, just you and me. Wake up all the doctors make the ol’ people well. (Gamble & Huff, 1975)

The Memo: Wake Up, Everybody!

Memo Entry 10: Thursday, February 17, 2011

God, OMG, OMG, OMG, today was amazing. I am so thankful that you made me start volunteering with Ms. Shabazz at the University of Utah for the last couple of months. Now God, you know at first, I was mad because I was like, why do you have me helping with this job for free? I mean, I know you were doing it to give me something to do while I am unemployed due to the company layoff. Anyway, today we hosted the annual Black Student Union conference at the U. We had over 700 Black kids on campus from all over Utah. It reminded me of our Black Student Union conference at Weber State. The theme was “Commemorating Our Past & Embracing Our Future.” We had this dope speaker named Dr. Osceola Mcarthy Adams. OMG, she told her story about how she was helping with a mentoring program with her sorority.
at her college called Delta Gems. She is a member of DST. But, God forbid, I’m not going to hold that against her. LOL! You have a funny sense of humor, God, because Ms. Shabazz is in that sorority too.

God, Dr. Osceola Macarthy Adams told us that she was out mentoring the girls at a basketball game, and she and her soror were arrested. She explained that the game was heated, and some girls in the group had gone out of the gym and were confronted by the school officers. She and her went out to see what was going on, and the police, as usual, went to the left. Dr. Macarthy Adams had a seizure, and when she fell to the ground, she hit the officer. After she woke up in the hospital, they arrested her for resisting arrest and hitting a police officer. As she was telling her story, some of the kids were crying, and she told them to stop crying because her story was part of her testimony, and it was a way to wake up the world about the injustices of the corrupt judicial system. She explained that courts found her guilty, but God used the governor to pardon her. God, you know what I am going through with the court system right now. It’s like you sent her here to wake me up and let me know everything concerning my life was still under control and I would be just fine.

God after her keynote speech, we split the kids up by gender. She was talking in an all-girl’s workshop, and she said Ms. Ashá come here. So, I walked up to her, and she said tell your story. God, I looked at her like she was crazy. I was not on the program to speak, and I am not a public speaker. Anyway, she looked at me and she said you have a story to tell and it’s time to tell your story. Dr. Macarthy Adams is funny. She was very persistent, God. So, I shared with the girls that my mom was a junkie who never wanted me and was in and out of jail my entire life. After the workshop one of the girls came up to me and said ’Ms. Ashá, I have the same story as you. Whoa God, I didn’t think anybody else had my story. Dr. Mccarthy said, “Docta I need
to talk to you for a minute. God I ain’t no docta and I told her that. She said, “you are not one now, but you shall be. Now get this! I’m gonna say this again. Just to make sure you got it. You are Dr. Ashá Jones, and he who began a good work in you shall be faithful and just to complete it until the very end” She said, “Look up Philippians 1:6, Docta!” Dr. Macarthy Adams told me to get ready to start working with college students. She said, “Ashá you have a call on your life to work with college students. Get ready! She said this is a volunteer job for now, but just watch what happens.” I have no clue what she is talking about God. God, you know I want to work in sports marketing. Plus, God, if I work in the NFL. I can get one of these NFL players and get this money baby. HA HA! Dr. Macarthy Adams gave me her number and email and told me that I was connected to her for life. She said, “You just gained a new big sister, friend, and mentor. And just because we wear different sorority colors doesn’t mean we are not sisters even if you chose the wrong sorority.” God, I laughed at her. Dr. Macarthy Adams. She is so cool, thanks for sending her my way. Even though I don’t know what she is talking about with that doctor stuff. I am not going back to school. God, thank you for sending the right people to me at the right time in my life. Alright, God, I hope you have a good rest of the day. I am going to relax for a minute then I must study your Word. Love ya, God!

Music Mentor Snapshot: Wake Up, Music Mentor!

As I (re)listen to and (re)discover the lyrics so eloquently sung by Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes when they introduced “Wake Up Everybody” in 1975 as a reflection of the political climate of the social unrest that Black people faced after the Vietnam War, the lyrics of the song still hold meaning 48 years later. As a Black woman, dealing with racism, mental health issues, the political process, and the emotional toll of being met with hatred while being told I must still love has been exhausting. The words to the song have helped me think about how important it is
to want to be seen, heard, and valued instead of being bullied, rejected, and faced with institutionalized racism every day in school and society. The lyrics assisted me in gaining a deeper comprehension of the overarching theme of racism that manifested itself repeatedly in my lived experiences.

After all the angels who watched over me and the lyrics issued a clarion call for me to wake up, engage, and make a difference in this world, I was awake but still sleeping while volunteering at the University of Utah, and God sent a mentor to wake me up. The lyrics taught me that I could once again dream. I could engage again. I could breathe again. The lyrics allowed me to (re)imagine the challenges I faced as a Black woman. They allowed me to (re)establish my commitment to the higher calling that had been placed on my life.

The song shows a vision of the future and the need to teach in a different way. It’s time to teach a new way for Black girls and women to heal, to not always require them to be so strong and to build the Black girls and women who come after me. The lyrics helped me to continue to comprehend the theme that I still needed help, and they also helped me to understand that I would be offered the assistance that was necessary to navigate the challenging educational complex and society. *Wake up, everybody! No more sleepin’ in bed. No more backward thinkin’.* *Time for thinkin’ ahead* (Gamble & Huff, 1975). When I met Dr. Macarthy, the lyrics (re)calibrated me, and she (re)minded me that the call on my life was bigger than me, and the lyrics in the song were too. If Ashá chooses to be an infinite person which I choose to be, then I will teach Black girls and women beyond me. No more sleepin’ for me. Within the backdrop of this critical incident, there were three recurring themes: racism, being silenced, and needing help.
Mentor Snapshot: Wake Up, Black Woman!

*Wake up everybody no more sleepin in bed,*
*No more backward thinkin time for thinkin ahead*
(Gamble & Huff, 1975)

She had natural hair that had a fresh press, she didn’t wear make-up and she had a caramel color-skin complexion, and she was young, gifted, she held a Ph.D., and she was Black woman. She had worked with, talked with, and been mentored by Black legends like Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, Ambassador Andrew Young, Surgeon General Regina Benjamin & Johnetta B. Cole. She had been a journalist for *Ebony* magazine. Her words could flow from the streets to the suites. She could break down pedagogies like they were lyrics from a rap song. As she was in the middle of her speech what I heard her say to me was:

> When you get this knowledge, Ashá, nobody can take that from you. Ashá, this is understanding who am I. Ashá, this is understanding where I been. Ashá, this is knowing I am not scared and fear is not my future, and fantasy is not my judge. Where am I going? Ashá, think about this beyond today. Where are you going? My sister’s keeper, there is something about lifting and climbing. Kill the foolishness. Call a spade a spade, Ashá.

Her name was Dr. Osceola Macarthy Adams, who at the time I did not know would become my advocate, my cheerleader, my prayer partner, my sponsor, my voice of reason, and yet another angel who woke me up and told me it was time to think ahead. She woke up the “docta” inside of me the day I met her. She is the first person in my life that proclaimed that I could earn a doctorate and become a “docta” just like her.

Dr. Macarthy was a spiritual mentor who was different from all the other mentors I had encountered up until this point. It was the fact that she was only 3 years older than me, and her voice was changing the current generations and beyond. Over the course of the mentor/mentee relationship, she helped me to understand who I am as a scholar and who I am as a woman of God. Dr. Macarthy knew who I was when she met me as I was still struggling to understand and figure out who I was.

On November 15, 2022, I opened the Zoom room, and there was Dr. Macarthy Adams with a big smile on her face, and she says hello, “Docta!” I chuckled at her. She said, “Isn’t it
funny how prophecy comes to fruition. Twelve years ago, you were laughing when I called you ‘docta,’ and here we are now and you in the final phase of earning a Ph.D.” She said, “Before we begin, Docta, open us up in prayer.” I smiled and I opened in prayer—what a magnificent opportunity it was to pray for the person who prays for you. My first question to Dr. Macarthy Adams was what was your ethnicity, and she said, “Like Black power Black abundance, Black excellence Black, Black, Black.” We chuckled, and as I took notes, I (re)cognized that Dr. Macarthy was still bold in being a Black woman who held power, abundance, and excellence.

Dr. Macarthy as a mentor gave me the free agency to maintain my identity as a Black woman, but, more importantly, as a woman of God. Our first interaction was so profound on so many different levels because of her insight of who I shall become, even though I resisted part of that. She understood the assignment, and the call on her life would bring out the call on my life. Like the song so eloquently says, *Wake up all the doctors make the ol’ people well. They’re the ones who suffer an’ who catch all the hell* (Gamble & Huff, 1975). Her comprehension of the God’s call on her life could see that I was catching hell in life, but it was time to awaken the “docta” in me. Dr. Macarthy Adams taught me that mentorship was multilayered. When she met me on that snowy day in Utah, she used the gift of the spirit of discernment to challenge the part of me that still struggled knowing who was, where I was going, my worth, fear, and the fighter still in me. She noted:

> When I think of mentorship it is individual and spiritual, it’s individual on what you want. And think you want and its spiritually what God knows you need. So, what you need verse God, knowing what you need. And I think that was totally divine, if I must say, so I didn’t know a lot about you. What I can’t say though, is when I brushed up on you and gave you that word you was resistant was like who is this chick? No, she won’t try me. So, I didn’t know you. I didn’t know you prior to this, I only knew you from the interaction we had at the conference. (Macarthy Adams, 2022)
My relationship with Dr. Macarthy Adams over the years has been multilayered as she was able to tap into both my flesh and my spiritual womanhood. So Ashá from 1993 looks very different from Ashá in 1997, and the Ashá in 1997 looks very different from the Ashá in February 2011. Furthermore, the Ashá of 2011 looks very different from the Ashá in 2023. Dr. Macarthy Adams expounded on that during our interview. As she has witnessed me battle through the craziness of working in systems of education and going through some of the same battlefields I went through, she looked at my core and even understood that I was inquisitive. I was not easy on her when I first met her, but I also did not have my normal fight-or-flight reaction with her, and I believe that is part of the reason why God brought her to campus that day. Dr. Macarthy Adams talked about who I was then, but has then expounded on who I am now. Our interaction at the conference was so profound on so many levels because I was volunteering at the conference and was not working, and I was trying to understand why I was even at the conference. She indicated:

You don’t know me? I don’t know. If you know, but you gone feel God today. And I ain’t on this today, I’m just trying to mind my business at this conference. I even supposed to be up in this piece. I ain’t getting paid. And you’re gonna come up in here, oh no you ain’t. Oh, you go on back to the Chi. So that’s who you were upon that interaction.

Dr. Macarthy Adams understood then and now that I am still that same inquisitive Black woman, but it is also a part of who I am today through all my lived experiences, good or bad. She mentioned:

But again, admittedly, it’s it speaks so divinely and beautifully to who you are today, because it sheds light on that piqued interest that you exuded in that moment. You gave me all that in paraphrasing, but it hits something. And I think that something is a developing and maturing spirit that you had possessed at that time. And although we don’t know sometimes what our inflection points are, I knowing what happened at that time. You know, what, 12 years ago now, know now that that was an inflection point in your spiritual maturation. Because there was something in my spirit that was saying, Yeah, I’m all this on outside. But wait, you sounded like some? I don’t know if I could
just put that to rest. So that bleeds into who you are now. I think that you’re a woman of
great value to our communities. I think you are a woman of great virtue, a praying
woman which I highly regard. I think you now exude what I was just saying us, but
strong maturation, spiritually, and definitely professionally. I think that along the ride and
road, you’ve had some strong things that could have taken you out and along the ride and
the things you’ve shared with me, oh my God from Oklahoma, and Langston, all the way
to now and San Diego State, your stint in Chicago. (Macarthy Adams, 2022)

Dr. Macarthy Adams understood that even though there was joy and pain during the
journey to where I am now it was all about the development of who Ashá Jones was becoming.
Her unwavering support was the most impactful thing to me at every inflection point along my
journey since meeting her. As the song lyrics point out, *Wake up all the doctors make the ol’
people well*. The “docta” helped the “docta” to develop into who she is today. Within the
backdrop of this critical incident, there were three recurring themes: racism, being silenced, and
needing help.

**Girls in the Hood: Believe Black Women**

This final memo differs from the others in that it summarizes the last 7 years of my life. It
includes all five of the most critical incidents in my life, as well as those that I am still struggling
with now. In addition, the space that this memo provided permitted me to (re)flect and
(re)member my lived experiences from my undergraduate life, postgraduate life, and the path to
earning my doctorate. This segment illustrates my capacity to begin the healing process and
confront what I endured but also to overcome. This narrative memo provides a complete picture
of the joy, pain, sunshine, and rain of my lived experiences. Furthermore, it allowed me to
examine more deeply the trauma I experienced as a Black woman in the educational complex
and society. Ashá’s Lyrics provided me space to examine more deeply the trauma I experienced
as a Black woman in the educational complex and society, which was illustrated by the themes
of racism, being silenced, being labeled, needing help, and being pushed out.
Boylorn (2016b) employed Black girl autoethnography that is critical and culturally situated research, which begins at home with the bodies we inhabit and the social situations we face, to explore and place a way of being in and seeing/experiencing the world through a race and gendered perspective. Ashá’s Lyrics gave me space to harness home as I incorporated the intersections of who I was and who I am now while understanding my cultural representation, endarkened epistemology, and the entirety of my Black girl autoethnography as I used music, memos, and mentors to navigate the educational complex and society systems that included classrooms, workplaces, and communities (Boylorn, 2016b; Crenshaw, 1991; Dillard, 2000). Within Ashá’s Lyrics, all five themes of racism, being silenced pushout, labeling, and needing help appeared.

*Ashá’s Lyrics*

Memo entry: Thursday, January 5, 2023

**The Memo: God, I Thank You**

God, I want to stop and say thank you because I could never have made it without you. The last seven years of my life have been filled with a lot of joy, pain, sunshine and rain. God, I am in the final stages of my Ph.D. program. My story is so amazing, I am a girl born in chains, and society tried to chain me. I was diagnosed with dyslexia in kindergarten, yet I am going to obtain a doctorate in education. God, in 2016, a storm came to me, and it’s so ironic it’s storming as I type this. I watched the rain pour down like crazy today, but there was one moment when the sun came out. At that moment, I was frustrated with writing one of the last parts of Chapter 4 of my dissertation.

The sun was a reminder that since 2016, I began riding out a storm, but you sent your son (the sun) today to show me that the sun comes back out after every rain. It was May 10, 2016,
and I got that devastating call that PD had passed away. God, my college experience was
amazing because of Justice, PD, Christopher, Eugene, Kane, Chance, Lucky, PJ, Christina, Sax,
and Coach J. God, we fought, we yelled, we laughed, and we fought some more, but God, we
loved each other immensely. I am trying to understand why you took another one of my friends
from me; even though it’s been six years, it still hurts.

God, I can still remember the day I met PD. He had some white pants on with a football
jersey. I couldn’t wait to tell Justice about the new football player cuz that joker was fine. The
Vegas boys were making a comeback on campus because, for a minute there, I swear all the boys
were from Cali. LOL! Anyway, Justice was coming to my house that night, and I invited PD.
And ya girl was the bartender. Everyone loved the drinks I made. I had everyone twisted in the
spot. When Justice saw him, she said, “Mmmm, girl, he is cute.” I was like, “I told you.” PD
walked up to us, and we were smiling like Cheshire cats from Alice in Wonderland. He said,
“Hello, I hope y’all have fun tonight.” Justice was like, ‘Oh yes, we will.” We just laughed. After
that, we started kicking it with PD heavy. He and I both moved into the same apartment
complex.

God, you moved me from coast to coast on September 6, 2016. I interviewed in Cali, and
on September 8, 2016, they offered me the job. I moved to California with $300 in my pocket, no
place to live, and only what I could pack in my car. You provided for me the entire way.
Whenever I stopped in a city, a friend provided me with food and shelter. I arrived at my line
sister’s house at 2:22 a.m. on October 17, 2016. She laughed and said, “2:22 a.m. will always be
our favorite hour.” She hugged me and said everything was going to be okay. I had a dream that
I was at an ocean with cliffs, and in the dream, God, you told me that in California, I would
experience some of my biggest pains, that I would be publicly humiliated but privately
redeemed, and that I would receive recompense for my pain. Little did I know how true that would be.

God, you got me safely to California on October 21, 2016. October 24, 2016, my first day at work, my supervisor brought me to her office to welcome me to campus. God, at that moment, my spirit of discernment told me that I should be careful with her. To my surprise, the office that I was shown during the interview had been given to the employee I was to supervise and who was a white man. The students were protesting that day on campus. Black students were marching because a Black man was arrested with force. God, you know I love some woke students. I finally decided to apply for the Ed.D program. Even though Dr. Macarthy Adams told me that I would get a Ph.D.

God, as you know, the next day at work was wild. My supervisor told me, “This is the first time I’ve hired a Black woman that I’m not scared of,” and that she received bonus points for hiring a Black woman. She explained that she did not have a good working relationship with her supervisor (a Black woman); she stated that her boss was “very angry” all the time. She continued to share that she struggled with Black women because most had the “angry Black woman syndrome.” God, this chick is off the chain. I am so confused about why she thought it was okay to tell me that. God, I was so annoyed with her. She then explained to me that she had adopted three Black children. Then she said, “Oh, before you think of anything.” I don’t date Black men; I think they are disgusting.” God, I am still trying to understand why you had me work under her. Then God, a week later, she asked me if I would watch her kids because they told her that I was a nice Black woman after the kids came to work with her and met me. She said, “She was excited to see that her kids actually liked a Black woman.” What in the world does that mean, God? I still can’t believe I watched her kids. I was so nervous to say no because
she held power over me. I allowed my fear to make me do something I should not have done. After all, your word says in 2nd Timothy 1:7 that you don’t give the spirit of fear but of love and a sound mind. So I should have not been afraid of her.

God, then you brought me to 2017. I was growing and learning in California and loved going to the beach every day. Oh, yeah, that dream I had you when you showed me—I was at the beach by the cliffs. I found that beach. God, you are so intentional about everything. Little did I know I was about to start experiencing that pain and public humiliation. I remember being so frustrated in April 2017 when you told me that I didn’t get into the Ed.D. program. I called Dr. Mccarthy Adams, and she told me “You are Dr. Ashá Jones. Remember that, and I said you would get a Ph.D.” She cracks me up. She told me to apply next year. 2017 was cool. I was still working for my off-the-chain supervisor. I was picked to attend a professional development conference in Hawaii. I was so excited to be going back to Hawaii.

God, this is so wild my supervisor’s boss wanted to meet with me without my boss. She was in a high-ranking leadership position at the university. Seeing a Black woman in a position of power at a PWI was exciting. When I met with her, she told me she liked my style and that I had the potential to grow at the university. She told me that she heard I was going to Hawaii. God, I remember her telling me to make sure I connected with the other top leaders from the university that would be there. She said they also wanted to get to know me. I was a little disappointed; after our meeting, she asked if I could watch her two kids. She said she was looking for someone to help out, and I appeared to have a good spirit. God, she was in a position of power; how could I tell her no? So, I said yes. She asked me if I was free over the weekend. I started watching her kids in 2017 and until 2019. Anyway, I met with the leadership in Hawaii, and they told me I was great and had a lot of potential. One leader told me they wanted to meet
with me when we returned. They said some opportunities were coming up, and they felt I was a
good fit for one of them.

When I went to my hotel, I sent an email to her admin asst. to get on her calendar. I
texted my new mentor and told her. She said, “Keep shining you are gifted.” Little did I know a
few years later that she was not who I thought she was. God, we got back and two weeks later I
met with the administrator. She told me about an opportunity and asked me if I wanted the job.
She said it would start in January or February of 2018. I asked her for some more details about
the job, and asked if I could connect with her again once I thought it out. She told me that she
would also set up a meeting with the person who would supervise me in early January. I
remember calling my home boy Dr. Ben X and telling him about the opportunity. We discussed
the pros and cons of the job. One of the things I love and dislike about Dr. Ben X is the fact that
he always reminds me of my worth. I still remember when we met back in Utah at this Que
function, and he said oh you are the SGRHO everyone talks about. It’s so nice to finally meet the
one and only SGRHO in Utah. I really didn’t like him after that snarky comment. LOL! I think I
had met match in giving out snarky comments. Nevertheless, we have become friends, prayer
partners, and ministers to each other. Even when he gets on my nerves. God, you remember the
first time Dr. Ben X and I hung out. I heard he was vegan. So, I ordered vegan entrée and hated
it. He was like you don’t like huh. I was like oh it’s good. I am just not that hungry. God, I
absolutely didn’t like it. God, I am so thankful for his friendship. He has stuck with me through
some hard times. And he rode for me during my time at this school in Cali. Reminding me that
folks who are called by God, don’t have it easy but it’s worth it.

God in January 2018 I met with the person who would become my supervisor. I
remembered seeing him around campus all the time. He had a unique style of dress. LOL.
Anyway, he told me all about the job, and when I would start. He explained that there were some technical difficulties because HR was in transition. I asked if we could hold off telling my current supervisor until we had something set in stone. Three days later my current supervisor called me and asked me, “When were you going to tell me about your new job.” I told her that I didn’t officially have a new job, that I did discuss with leadership some new opportunities. God, she was mad as fish grease. After that meeting, she canceled all but two meetings with me until I went to the new job. Normally they have a party for folks when they leave the department. A colleague told me she asked about it, and she told her no about having a party for me. The cool thing was I never had to watch her kids again God. LOL!

God, I was so excited it was March 2018, and I was going back to Hawaii. I submitted a proposal, and it was accepted into the conference. I was so happy because one of my neos moved to Hawaii and I was going to see her while I was there. I got the email that the job was finally posted that we talked about months ago. God, I remember them telling me that I didn’t have to apply for the job, but I guess something changed. God, I think you need to send me to Hawaii more often. Good things happened to me when I am there. I applied and got the call that I had in an interview in April.

The interview went well, and I got the job. I wanted to make sure I gave enough notice to my current supervisor so we can create a transition plan. God, she met with me and 15 mins into the conversation she told me she had an emergency and needed to end the meeting. I spoke with my mentor at the university and she told me that she and the other leaders felt it was best for me to start on May 14, 2018, and I didn’t need to give a two week notice. God, remember that dream where you said I would be publicly humiliated, but receive my healing privately with a recompense. So, it begins. God, I arrived at 8:00 a.m. on May 14, 2018. I had spoken with my
spiritual mom and my mentor mom. My spiritual mom told me to keep my eyes alert in this new season. My discernment had to be greater in this new journey, and she told me, “Ashá for every new level. There’s a new devil.” Later, that morning, I received a call from one of the top leaders requesting that I come to her office for a meeting. God, why did she want to meet with me? I called my adopted mom and we prayed. She said, “don’t worry, everything is fine.” I met with the top leader, and she let me know that I was being offered a different job. I was like but God, I just started this job. She explained that another person was leaving a position and they thought I was a better fit. I asked what the job was, and she told me. God it never set right in my spirit. I should have never taken that job. I told her I needed to pray about it. I called Dr. Ben X and Ms. Shabazz. Dr. Ben X said remember your worth. Ms. Shabazz reminded me God has you no matter what.

I prayed, and I called my mentor at the university. She told me let’s meet for lunch. We met she told me that it was never their intention for me to go into the position I started and that there was more for me at the university. God, she told me she would have my back and that this wasn’t an opportunity I could turn down. If I did I wouldn’t get another one at the university. So, the other top leader called me later that evening, and she asked me if I had made a decision. I told her I was unsure. She told me, “Well I have another incentive for you. We are also going to give you more money for the job. God, I had a hood moment. All I could think about was Tupac’s lyrics in that moment. “Don’t let the evil of the money trap me when you see me nigga you better holla at me.” God, I am so glad I can be real with you. Because as you know I am hood, but a holy. I am still Arcella’s grandchild, and I am a soldier. LOL! I crack myself up. God, in my spirit I knew that job was a war zone, and I was about to enter it. They allowed me to think about it for two weeks. I was told various things about the new position, but at the end of
the day the campus mentor reminded me it would not be a good look if I said no. But God I knew the entire time you knew my story and how it would go. I finally accepted the job. Within days, I found out the employees I would oversee didn’t want me there and the administration had just thrown me to the wolves.

God from May 2018 to November 2020 I experienced pure hate from that campus. They watched every move I made. Colleagues called me angry. Folks said that I didn’t know what I was doing. God, other Black folks on campus band wagoned with the white folks to come against me. One of my colleagues who was Black woman told me she didn’t think I was qualified for the job, and she should have gotten the job. The same girl who had asked me to pray for her turned on me. This became a theme of my experiences there and God that junk hurt. Please let me know how I heal from this pain. God, In October 2018 I was switched positions again. I was told in a public setting, and everyone knew about the change but me. As I write to you today it still hurts. God, I was publicly humiliated the top university administrator, but I was told by my campus mentor that I needed to put my big girl draws on and suck it up. How could a Black woman say this to another Black woman. God, you have got to be kidding. She would always remind me that she faced the same experiences, but playing the game always got her to the top. God, I don’t play games or politics. I am Ashá S. Jones, and I am here to help kids get across the stage. God, they took so much from me, but I gained so much more trust in you. They gave me a fancy title that was meaningful to everyone else but me. God, the people were so mad. God, they stripped me from job duties, they would say my name wrong and spell my name wrong and would pull me into meetings and tell me that I seemed angry. They literally were trying to break my soul. God when I saw this picture it was an example of my experience.
God, I am thankful, but I still don’t understand, but I trust you. God when that job announcement happened a colleague who I thought was a good person called me over 50 times and told me how bad he felt about what happened. Little did I know it was all fake. As a matter fact he was part of the problem. A person so broken by his own life experiences he chose to break other people. Especially those who had a voice and stood up for themselves. I pray for him often. I pray that the little broken boy will be healed so that his pain doesn’t continue to leak onto others.
God, I will never forget he asked me if I was going to apply for a Ph.D. program. I told him no I have already been denied twice why would I do that again. He said, “Ashá you should apply. I will help you with your personal statement and write you a letter of recommendation” God it was his guilt. He knew he had done me dirty. I called Dr. Mccarthy and explained what was going on with the job, and told her about the PhD. Program application deadline is coming up. She said, “It’s your season Dr. Jones. You need to apply.” So, I applied.

God I am still trying to make sense of this whole job situation. God, they were dogging me out still. Giving me last minute assignments that were almost impossible for me to complete. Nevertheless, God you sent me my Sisters4Lyfe Dr. b hook davis and Klarc. Yo, them my girls. God and I thank you for it. We ride for each other. They ride for me and I ride for them. God, when I told them about that big project that they gave me to complete with only five weeks to complete the assignment. They stepped in and helped me. God my Sisters4Lyfe we have fought through some stuff together, sickness, death, celebrations, and laughter. I mean God our friendship is the epitome of joy, pain, sunshine and rain. Finding out one of the people in the crew wasn’t down for us was devasting to me. God, you know what song comes to mind it is Dre Day, with Dr. Dre featuring Snoop Doggie Dog. LOL. “You used to be my homie you used to be my ace.” Alright God, let me get together. I told you God I love a good ratchet song still. LOL! God, we have been through the bad, but we are in season where I will see your good. Dr. H and Klarc have been mentors to me in so many ways. Dr. H taught me how to use my academic voice. Dr. b hooks davis can write like nobody I have ever met. Give her a pen and pad and she can get at it. Plus, she challenges me to always read something. Now Klarc, that is Ms. Chill. That girl so calm. She has challenged me in many ways to just chill on some things in life. She is the calm to my storm. She is a dope writer too. Klarc, stood up for me when that “coo” at work
came against. She made sure that they didn’t label me as an angry Black woman when she was in
the room. Now Klarc is an old soul. She’s in her 20’s but you would think she was like 50. I
appreciate her wisdom and friendship. God your word says, to surround yourself with iron that
will sharpen you. They sharpen me for the better. God, I pray you bless them in a mighty way for
all that they have done and been to me.

God, I will never forget what happened on April 29, 2019, at 4:28 p.m. that I received
from Dr. Goldstein. She is such a cool lady. I remember when I met her the first time she had on
an all-Black outfit. I met her for the first time because I had not heard from the department about
my application, and so I went to her office to see what was going on. Only to find out that my
application was not there. Somehow, there was a glitch, and my app didn’t go through. She
helped me to get it fixed and to get everything submitted. I was so thankful she helped me. And
every time after that she always had on Black. God, I still need to ask her about that. We have a
great relationship. She has helped me so much in this program. God, she is one of the first white
women that I have met that has stood up for me. Especially throughout this whole entire Ph.D.
program. Dr. Goldstein is dope. She has always told me that I was meant to be here. God, I get
so sidetrack at times. Her email on April 29, 2019, read:

Hi, Ashá I’m on a plane returning from teaching in Palau and I just learned that you were
accepted into the program! Official notification will come tomorrow but I wanted to let
you know as soon as possible! All the best, Dr. Goldstein.

God, I applied three times and got two no’s and here I am about to finish this thing. God thank
you! And the drama at work didn’t stop. I realized the Black woman I looked up to at work who
was in a of position turned on me. As a matter of fact, she had been collaborating with the white
folks and that other Judas at work. It broke my heart. I mean, I helped her when she was in a
situation, and I told no one about her situation. Even when her colleagues would ask me, I kept
her secret. When folks talked about the Judas crew, I always protected them, but come to find out they were not protecting me. God, they allowed systems of whiteness rule their decision. Power and position were more important than me. It was heart breaking. But God, every Joseph experiences a pit right?

Fall 2019 was a blur, I received a diagnosis that I would probably never be able to have children and the doctors thought I might have cervical cancer. I was experiencing racism in the classroom as a Ph.D. student. One of the professors told me that I should not have been accepted into the program because I was not Ph.D. material. How could he say such a thing, God? The other professor who was a white woman, was a mess too. There was a girl in the class who clearly had a problem with me because I was Black and gifted and could pick up on the concepts quickly. I had gotten the call from the doctor about my health during class, and I came back and had to put on my face as if nothing was wrong. The other student kept pressing me to answer her questions and to talk to her. I told her that she had to chill. I found out later that she and the professor went to the department, and I heard from someone that the white girl wanted me out the program. It made me think back to my middle school experience with Cami and Mr. Tueller. Racism doesn’t change no matter the level. My anxiety was at an all-time high. I was fighting racism and white supremacy in and out of the classroom, and still trying to figure out how to trust you God.

God, Jan 9, 2020, I entered the hospital for surgery. My home girl, Victoria, took me to the hospital. My adopted dad called me and prayed with me. My Sisters4Lyfe called me to check in before I went into surgery. They wheeled me back for surgery. Lord, I woke up to a white woman who was a doctor. She explained that she was glad to see me awake. The surgery went longer than anticipated. It was 5 hours, and it was only supposed to be a two-hour surgery. The
next words were chilling to me. She said, “We weren’t able to get one of the cysts off your ovaries. If we had done that, we would have needed to do a full hysterectomy. The cyst on your right ovary was sitting on your bladder and it was the size of a grapefruit. “You are a believer, right?” She asked me. I told her that I was a believer. Well, you probably should find a nice lady at church and see if she wants to be a surrogate mother for you because you can’t have kids. The good news is you don’t have cancer. You have Stage 4 endometriosis and there isn’t a cure for it. You learn how to live with it. We are going to keep you over night and you will get to go home tomorrow.” God are you kidding me. Like who does or says what she did and said. God, I trust you, but this don’t make no sense. My line sister Belle was coming to stay with me. She’s a nurse. I was excited she was coming, but I also knew she was gonna get on my nerves with all of her rules. We both think we know everything. HA HA! My Sistas4Lyfe called me, and I answered they were like girl we been calling you. I told them the surgery went longer than anticipated. Belle stayed with me until Monday evening. That morning around 9:10 a.m. I received a call from HR stating that I did not communicate that I was on leave to my supervisor. Belle said, she just had surgery y’all need to handle that when she gets back to work. I told Belle I had an email that would prove otherwise. The HR person insisted that I didn’t tell anyone that is why he was calling. The HR person said they needed the information before the end of the day, or I would be marked as a-wall. I told Belle to get my computer. I found the emails. I was so medicated. Belle helped me write the email. I showed the email where I called HR to inquire about how medical leave works. I showed the email I had sent to my supervisor advising her of my medical leave dates, and the note from the doctor I had sent in. God, why do they not believe Black women? Why do we always have to prove ourselves to them? God, when I returned to work, I asked my supervisor if I could telework. The stress of the environment had taken a toll
on me. I was also dealing with life. I cried not because I was sad, it was because I was angry. God, that white woman looked at me and said, “This is the moment I have wanted to see. You do have emotions. I wish you I could have seen your tears earlier.” God, you have got to be kidding me. This white woman genuinely wanted to break me.

God it’s been almost two years since I left that place. I thank you for allowing me to go on medical leave and start the healing process. And you sent a few more earthly angels to watch over me. During that time, you sent me Brionne. She taught me that even if my mom who bore me rejected me that God would never reject me. Brionne is a prayer warrior. She has been through storm and rain, but she is a ferocious warrior as a person and as a prayer warrior. I am thankful she has pushed me in prayer and into my true call in this life. Then there is Dr. Ethel Cuff Black that woman has taught me so much about being authentically me. She walks into the room and commands it. She has pushed me in my writing. And she doesn’t miss a beat. I saw her over the last year deal with death and sickness and still show up. She has protected me in the academy and made a commitment to never let anyone treat me any kind of way. She challenges whiteness in academic spaces, and she plays no games. God I thank you Bishop Truth his mentorship over the last few years have been simply amazing. God that man has lived through some tough times and you wouldn’t even believe it. He doesn’t look like the smoke he has been through. Part of my healing process is we do this weekly text and talk about hot topics. He’s so hood but so holy and he gets me. He’s not only a pastor but he holds a PhD. Bishop is a real dude and a true man of God.

As tears roll down my face now. God, I realize I survived. God, Tupac was shot five times and lived. Like Tupac I had been shot and left for dead in the academy. Folks turned on me. I was put in a pit. I had to sit with lions. The evil of money tried trapped me God, I think
about Meg the Stallion who folks didn’t believe her, and she had to take the heat from the world. At the end God her story was told, and the world seen that she wasn’t lying. God, my dissertation is my Black girl autoethnography. It’s how free myself and other Black girls and women from the chains of oppression, suppression, and depression. Like Nas, said, if I rule the world which my story does I free all my Black girls and women. God, thank you. This one is for all the Black girls and women who have a story to tell. God, I wrote this on my Facebook age on, April 30, 2019.

God, I close this journal with a prayer. God, I thank you for every hard time. I thank you for everything that came up against me. God, I choose to forgive those who hurt me. I pray that you bless them and make them whole. I will use my degree to change your people. I will remain who you called me to be. I thank you for loving me. God, your word says to speak those things as they aren’t as though they are. Therefore, I am Dr. Ashá S. Jones, as Black Rob would say “Like, Whoa” In Jesus name. Amen!
The Music Mentor: Ashá's Top Mix

No place seems to be safe, But you’ve been my protection Every step of the way. And I wanna say. Thank you Lord for all you’ve done for me. (Hawkins, 2008)

The music mentor in this section is a conglomerate of music lyrics that connect to the music and me. This critical incident contains myriad joy and pain as I navigated through academia and society. The first song I unpack is in the opening of the memo, and that is me thanking God for all that he has done for me from 2016 until now. As I have grown in my relationship with God and his word, I understand that I should not be here today considering all that I have been through. Nevertheless, the song lyrics are a depiction of how social justice is divinely intertwined into every aspect of my life.

Tragedies are commonplace. All kinds of diseases, people are slipping away. Economies down, people don’t get enough pay. But as for me all I can say is. Thank you Lord for all you done for me (Hawkins, 2008). The lyrics show me how God and his word make the pursuit of social justice both a requirement of religious faith and an essential aspect for the life of followers of Christ (Taylor, 2012). The concept of social justice can be traced back to the biblical concept of a triune God who repeatedly demonstrates his love and compassion for those who are disadvantaged, vulnerable, marginalized, disenfranchised, or disinherited. The tragedies of my lived experiences were common to me; the disease of being pushed out, rejected, and disrespected were my reality, but even in the midst of that, my music mentor taught me that I held the power to be thankful for my circumstances and my story in order to change someone’s story. Furthermore, the song says, But you’ve been my protection every step of the way and I want to say, thank you Lord for all you’ve done for me (Hawkins, 2008). I am (re)cogizant of the
fact that my lived experiences provide me the space to help someone after me, and therefore I am thankful for the experience.

**The Music Mentor: Friends.**

How many of us have them? Friends. Ones we can depend on. Friends. How many of us have them? Friends. Before we go any further, let’s be. Friends. How many of us can say that we have friends? (Smith, 1984)

Even though I was only 7 years old when this song was released in 1984 and my grandmother had an old record player in the living room, I can (re)member my grandmother playing this song on her record player. Whenever my grandmother and her friends were together, they were playing Spades and singing along to this song. I can (re)call my granny telling her friend, Ms. Sarah, that you are really my friend and we will be friends for the rest of my life. My grandmother and Ms. Sarah had a bond that was unbreakable. Both of them would always tell me, “Ashá, your true friends are the ones who will love you through the good and the bad times.”

As I delve deeper into the meaning of the lyrics to this song, I’ve come to the conclusion that my relationships with my friends from college were very much like those shared by Ms. Sarah and my grandmother. Furthermore, I understand that music is my community, my voice, and my reason, and one that has loved me, taught me, and understood me.

Over the years, I have learned music has a hidden power that has allowed me to develop, grow, and navigate systems of education. Within those systems of education, I came across several fake mentors, also known as fake friends, whom I name as mentors in this text, which caused me to question mentorship. However, the constant mentor was music, and it has been a mentor I have never questioned and always listened to. My relationship with music has helped to stabilize me, establish my place in the world, and serve as a pillar of strength for me as I navigate the educational and social structures of modern society.
“Before we go any further, let’s be friend.” My ability to process both genuine and phony friendships along the way was enabled by the lyrics of this song. In particular, these lyrics helped me understand what mentorship and positive relationships are, as well as what they should and should not be. The lyrics allude to the presence of friends while simultaneously confirming their existence, regardless of whether these friends took the form of peers, colleagues, or other reliable adults.

**The Music Mentor: Holla at Me**

Are you confused? You wonder how it feels to walk a mile inside the shoes of a nigga who don’t have a thing to lose, When me and you was homies no one informed me it was all a scheme. You infiltrated my team and sold a nigga’s dreams. How could you do me like that? I took ya family in. I put some cash in ya pocket. Made you a man again. And now you let the fear put your ass in a place. Complicated to escape it’s a fool’s fate. Without your word you’re a shell of a man I lost respect for ya, nigga. We can never be friends. I know I’m runnin’ through your head now. What could you do? If it was up to you I’d be dead now. (Ervin, 1996)

Many people thought Tupac was full of rage and anger, but when you dissect the lyrics within the lyrics, you can see a message within the lyrics. As mentioned earlier, Tupac was shot five times as he got off an elevator in a recording studio by so-called friends and then was sent to prison to serve an 8-month prison sentence. I (re)cognize within the song lyrics that Tupac is talking about friendships that were nonexistent because the people he thought had his back were really his foes.

My lived experiences are very similar to Tupac. My time in that workplace taught me that some of the people I thought were my “homies” were not, and no one informed me that it was all a ruse. As I stated in my memo, some people in positions of power who claimed to be my mentor or work friends were, in fact, my adversaries. They were the ones who infiltrated my team and sold my dreams to systems of whiteness. Institutionalized racism seeks to keep power, and
racism will pit Blacks against Blacks. Just as the song states, “You let fear put your ass in place.” The folks who turned on me were afraid of whiteness, which holds power in work environments. Fear is complicated, and some folks are afraid to stand up to it; therefore, it becomes complicated to escape what Tupac stated is a “fool’s fate.”

The negative experiences caused me to lose respect for those I once respected. My experiences with bad mentorship caused me to see that I could never receive advice from those folks again, and I definitely did not want their mentorship because I could not respect them. The lyrics depict that when folks who hold power do wrong to a person, the wrong they did remains on their minds. Furthermore, the lyrics of the song depict Tupac stating that they wanted him dead. My experiences were no different; they wanted my career to die. They wanted to discipline me and humble me. They tried to break my soul, but they could not because I was built different. I am a rare breed.

When you see me out and about, make sure to holla at me because I have to be careful, and I can’t let the temptation of the money get the best of me. In the memo, I discuss the job transitions as well as people in authority who threw money at me to get me to participate in institutionalized racism. The reason that money was not offered was because it would have leveled the playing field between us. It would be appropriate to play the role of having a person of African descent in a position of power as a symbolic act of equality.

The lyrics enlightened me to the fact that I could never let the nefarious influence of money trap me, whereas in their case, the money had them cornered and trapped. People are willing to sell their souls for a dollar, but as a Black woman, my mission in that environment was never about the money. Instead, it was about being put in a position of power so that I could assist Black students in achieving their goals of graduating from college. People will sell their
souls for a dollar. On the other hand, some people let themselves be taken in by the allure of the money and ended up losing everything. According to the lyrics, “When you see me, you better holla” and “when you see my nigga, you better holla” are also included in the phrase. The lyrics bring up the fact that Tupac’s enemies not only attempted to capture him but also tried to take his life on multiple occasions. He was letting them know that their money and their trap had not succeeded in killing him, and that he was still alive. The five shots I took did not destroy me, just like they didn’t for Tupac. I took their shots and smiled. The evil of the money can’t and won’t trap me, so holla at me.

The Music Mentor: I Am Her

I’m her, her, her, her, her, her, her, her. She, she, she, she, she, she, she, she. Take a pic’, it’s me, me, me, me, me, me, me. Tell your friends “this her, her, her, her, her, her, her.” (Barbie et al., 2022)

The month of August 2022 saw the release of Meg the Stallion’s second studio album, titled Traumazine. After telling the world that Tory Lanez had shot her, Meg has been subjected to public humiliation, criticism, and abuse from members of society as well as the media over the course of the past 2 years. She was able to relate to the Black woman’s experience of having no one to believe her story.

During the entirety of the ordeal, Black women have remained by her side. Meg explained that she wanted this album to be about “herself” and that is why she created it. She provided an explanation for this decision on Twitter, saying, “I wanted to start writing in a journal, but I said f*ck it, I’ll put it in a song” (Suffolk, 2022). The lyrics of the song “Her” tell the story of her revealing herself to the outside world. The world has public opinion about Meg, so she was eager for people to have an accurate picture of who she is and allow her to determine her own worth. She lets the girl know I am the girl in question, but I should not be.
As I sort through my memo’s contents, I am reminded of my Sisters4Lyfe and the hostility and harassment we were subjected to as well as how, when we told her our stories, other people attempted to categorize us as something that we were not. In fact, a lot of people advised us not to tell our stories and, instead, to just push through the racism, pushback, and pushout that we were experiencing.

On multiple occasions, people told me things like, “You just need to put on our big girl underwear,” or “As Black women, this is just what we experience.” The lyrics to Meg’s song are an anthem for freedom that were inspired by the trauma Meg went through. Her trauma story allows me to tell my trauma story in order to free other Black girls and women. Moreover, it provides space to recognize the power that I hold to help others tell their story. With the lyrics, my Sisters4Lyfe and I were able to (re)define who we were and what we stood for by refusing to let the institution label us as “angry.”

When Black women speak out about the realities of their lives within the framework of whiteness, they put themselves in a Catch-22 situation. The lyrics allow Meg the opportunity to let the world know that she is that girl, even though some folks in the world tried to dehumanize her. Furthermore, it gives Black girls and women a place to speak out about the violence that they face in education and society by providing them with a place where their voices can be heard, which in turn gives them a place to speak out about the violence they face. My goal is to make sure that my voice is heard in racist environments, where I have lived as a Black girl and am now a woman.

*The Mentors: Ashá’s Mixed Tape*

The last memo features five mentors that helped me through the last 7 years of navigating a huge storm. As noted previously, Dr. H, Ms. Shabazz, and Dr. Macarthy Adams have played
influential roles in my life as I navigated from Black girlhood to Black womanhood. I now introduce the final mentors who were a huge part of assisting me through my lived experiences that caused joy and pain. Those mentors are: Dr. Ben X, Dr. bell hooks davis, Ethel Cuff Black, Bishop, Dr. Cubena McClure, and Brionne. Just like my first three mentors, they are all Black and the North star is God. Many of them are the first people in their families to go to college, and all of them have navigated institutionalized racism in systems of education and society.

**Mentor Snapshot: Dr. Ben X**

When I met Dr. Ben X, he stood over six feet tall, his hair had long locs past his shoulders, and he had on a black and gold shirt that said Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. He was smooth in how he moved. He was aloof, evasive, and did not talk to everyone. Dr. Ben X grew up on the South Side of Chicago, and his education brought him to Utah to work at a university as a professor in education, where he now serves as the dean of a community college.

During our first interaction, however, he chose to talk to me at the event. As I said, when we first met, he used his witty words to annoy me, but I thought I should still talk to him, although, after talking to him for a few minutes, I (re)alized I was not his biggest fan. Dr. Ben X was cocky and witty, just like me, so I finally met my match. He was the first Black man I met around my age who held a doctorate and was a professor at a university. He was also the first person I could not outwit with my words. Dr. Ben X met me at a critical time in my higher education career, as I was transitioning from working for the public sector within the government to now coming over to higher education.

When I met Dr. Ben X, I was processing so many different aspects of myself; I had just accepted some major roles working within my local church, and I was walking into a new environment. Dr. Ben X decided that he was going to take a chance on engaging me in a
friendship that ultimately turned into mentoring. To be honest, he could handle all of Ashá Jones. I knew that I was a lot and not everyone could handle who I was and what I had to offer. He explained that when we first met, “I was a conglomerate of people all wrapped up in one,” and he understood that people come with multiple layers. He noted, “You exhibited all of those layers, probably within the first five minutes of our interaction.” He saw that I had different layer, and he knew how to help me move through them on a spiritual, mental, and academic level.

Dr. Ben X’s mentoring was different from the other mentors in my life because he understood that there were so many layers to what I needed to succeed from a near-peer mentoring aspect. I believe that Dr. Ben X helped me find my voice, both spiritually and academically. Furthermore, he played a prodigious role in assisting me in becoming who I am now. As we talked in our interview, he explained:

I still believe that you are very confident in who you are. Without a doubt. I think you’re more confident in your skin than you’ve ever been. To a large degree. I believe that you are finding your stride in your voice as it relates to your voice academically, but then also, I would say oftentimes have a strong spiritual foundation that you also had a voice in as well. (Ben X, 2022)

Dr. Ben X was one who would truly push me out of my comfort zone. Because of the rejection I had faced in my dysfunctional family and racist education systems, I did not know my worth. Knowing my worth was an area that Dr. Ben X always worked with me on. Dr. Ben X constantly pushed me in. He would often remind me of my worth so that I would not settle for just anything, whether that was in the workplace, classroom, or relationships. His pushing helped me find my voice, whether in the school system or in society as a whole.

Another large part of my struggle in systems of education and society was believing in myself. I would second-guess myself all the time, and Dr. Ben X would not always provide me
the answer, but he would challenge me to look within myself because the answer was there. He also helped me to understand that growth was happening in the midst of my struggles. Dr. Ben X taught me how to fly when he was not around. He explained that part of me was finding my voice and growing into who I was as Black woman, like a bird trying to get out the egg, and the bird’s mother would not crack the egg open, but rather would allow the egg to find strength to crack the shell open, then ultimately fly. He noted:

And so while I do recognize that, yes, we have not been each other for answers and advice throughout the years that we’ve known each other. But even in the absence of answers, it was beneficial because you were able to find your voice without having somebody dictate or tell you what the answer should be. And I believe in doing that, there was a growth and also a belief in yourself that you did have the right answer, you didn’t know how to navigate those spaces. (Ben X, 2022)

Dr. Ben X was instrumental in my metamorphosis from a caterpillar to butterfly by allowing me to go into a cocoon, while understanding that a transformation was happening that I would soon come out of as a Black woman who would fly high.

Mentor Snapshot: Dr. hooks davis.

It was February 2, 2018, when I met Dr. bell hooks davis; we both attended the Sister 2 Sister luncheon for Black History Month. The Sister 2 Sister luncheon was hosted once a semester, and I was the speaker for the luncheon. I had seen Dr. hooks davis on campus a few times. I remember her because on Fridays, she would wear dope tennis shoes and a fresh sweatsuit. Dr. hooks davis was about five foot three, with long sister locs down to the middle of her back, and she commanded the room when she walked in. She was a professor workshop on campus. At the luncheon, my topic was “Black Gold Melanin Strong: Exploring Black Women Through Music.” At the end of the presentation, I took words from the Black women in the room and created a song that represented Black excellence. After the workshop, Dr. hooks davis came up to me and said, “That was dope! Girl, you are gifted.” She talked about how I was able to
make sure everyone’s voice was heard in the room by allowing everyone to give a word and put their voice into the song I created. She explained:

You gave a presentation, and I don’t recall what the presentation was about, but the one thing that I’ll never forget is that you ask everyone to write like I don’t know if it was a word or verse on a post it on the wall. And I remember thinking, What is she doing, like okay, we know right away, she sticking it all over the wall was this about and everybody was just looking. I could sense other people at my table. They’re like, Okay, what’s she gonna do? Okay, so you had these words on the wall. But as people were describing what these words and how these words resonated with them, you remembered, and it was like a photographic memory. And after everybody had contributed, you came up with this song that incorporated not only everyone’s words, but everyone’s voice. How did she do that? Like, how did she remember everyone’s story to connect it to the words, to make it into a song, like spontaneously, and made it coherent, to have meaning that resonated with everyone in the room? I mean, I was I was, I was dumbfounded. I mean, dumbfounded in the sense that I was just amazed and impressed. (hooks davis, 2022)

After that lunch, our mentor relationship began. Our mentor-to-mentee relationship was multilayered as Dr. hooks davis took on a new role at the institution as an administrator while still teaching. Dr. hooks davis had not worked on the administrative side of the house at the institution, which included programming, budgeting, and understanding the financial obligations at the institution, so in that capacity, I became the mentor to her because those were my areas of expertise.

When Dr. hooks davis met me in February 2018 at the institution, my overall demeanor was different because the work environment was different. It was not as toxic because I had not hit the height of the toxic war zone. She mentioned:

I’m going to frame this like this evolution of Ashá Jones in the past to what Ashá Jones is now. So when I met Ashá Jones, Ashá was this like, bombastic, cheerful, happy, you know, confident, Black woman who, you know, walked in her truths at this institution that, you know, did not celebrate or appreciate Black women generally. And the one thing that I noticed about Ashá, before I even had the opportunity to really know her on a personal level, is that she just has a heart for students. And she was very purposeful and intentional in helping students educating students informing students, you know, just the students that she had a heart for students. (hooks davis, 2022)
As we navigated the system, Dr. hooks davis noticed the shifts in my behavior after being moved into several positions by white leaders and Black leaders on campus who supported systems of whiteness and operated in oppression and suppression that weighed heavily on my mental health. She explained:

They weren’t ready for, you know, her brilliance and her ideas, you know, they just had this box that they want to keep you in and if you tried to step anywhere out of that box, you know, they were beating you to get back in. And so I’ve witnessed the beatdown, the, you know, the disparaging her name, the, you know, the attacks, the disrespect and the, you know, not giving her credit for all the good work that she’s done. And so, I’ve you know, I’ve watched, you know, I don’t know what I would probably describe as her fall, but the greatness is, I watched her rise. You know, Maya Angelou said, you know, they may beat me down with their lies, but still I rise. (hooks davis, 2022)

Dr. hooks davis noticed that my overall attitude shifted because of the pushout I was facing within the institution. She discussed how when Black women are confident in who they are and their truths and have a heart and passion for who they serve, white folks are intimidated by that and the goal becomes to dim the Black woman’s light. She explained that the institutional conception of racism is based on a transactional relationship as a requirement. Furthermore, even Dr. hooks davis was experiencing racism, pushout, and being labeled as the “angry Black woman” at the institution. Dr. hooks davis explored the idea that when racism is present, it doesn’t act alone—they will bandwagon together to contribute the full assault on the Black woman’s character.

Dr. hooks davis has a huge impact on me, as she helped me to remember who I was and that no matter the circumstances I faced, I could still rise. Ashá, a Black woman, could rise, no matter what she faced, and she helped me to understand that my circumstances at the institution didn’t determine my destiny.
Mentor Snapshot: Bishop Truth.

In October 2016, I arrived in California, and I heard about a local church. Everyone was telling me upon my arrival that I should attend this church. I ended up attending a Wednesday night Bible. I went to church a couple of times after that, but I was not sure if that is where I should attend church. So I wondered for about 2 years, and then in August 2018, I heard that I needed to go back to the church that everyone told me to attend when I first moved to California. August 26, 2018, Bishop Truth was preaching a message from the book of Amos, Chapter 9:11-13 and his message title was “Restoring David’s Tabernacle.” The scripture text was powerful at the time because I was going through a storm of life, and his message let me know that I could indeed be restored. Bishop Truth demonstrated to me what a voice in God looked like after going through a storm and being restored. His voice provided me with spiritual transformation and helped me to remember my identity in Christ. Each week I attended church, and Bishop’s word from the Lord strengthened me and guided me back to my North star.

Many folks were trying to figure me out at church. I was very aloof and evasive when I came to church. I was in and out. I did not stay back to talk to folks, and I most definitely was not trying to get involved with ministry. Bishop and I connected one Sunday while he was preaching in church. Before he started his sermon, he talked about a college football game in which the University of Alabama won. He said, “I have no clue how Alabama won that game yesterday.” With my crimson and cream Alabama shirt on, I yelled from the congregation, “Roll Tide!” He chuckled, and after church we talked about the game. He asked me why I liked Alabama. My answer was simple, “It’s where legends are made.” We laughed at the time, but that is where his mentorship began with me. We would have rants back and forth on Instagram
about the college football games, but that was how he mentored me during one of the roughest seasons of my life.

When I first met Bishop, I was trying to figure out who I was in the space of academia as a Black woman who grew up in a world with a lot of dysfunction, and Bishop picked up on that from his spirit of discernment. During our mentoring moments, he would draw that out of me. During my interview with Bishop, he shared:

I think that person who had an enormous perspective of the outside world is different than the woman today because the woman today has more of a perspective of her inside work. Like when I first met you was about the world around you. And now that that, you know, four years later, I see it starting to be about the world within you. You know, and it’s not just where do I fit, but how do I express who I am? You’ve fallen into a space where you are settling in a good way. You’re not floating, trying to figure out who but you’re settling on this is what I am and who I am and I’m good with it. (Truth, 2022)

Bishop helped me to see that my growth and transformation had to start from within because it was connected to my spiritual DNA. He has mentored me in the capacity to know that I could have free agency to become who I needed to be, and my tabernacle has been restored and I am whole.

**Mentor Snapshot: Dr. Faith.**

It was July 2012, and Faith was the sergeant at arms at our national sorority convention. It was the first day of the conference, and I showed up to the meeting discombobulated. My clothes were too big. I was dressed like a 65-year-old woman, but I was only 35 years old at the time. On top of that I was late and had a million and one things in my hand. For the next two days, I showed up late and looking a mess. Each day, Faith reminded me that I needed to be on time. However, on the fourth day, she became weary of my tardiness and sat me down after the business session and said, “Look girl, I can see your potential, but Black girl, you have got to get it together. I would like to mentor you if you are willing to hear what I have to say.” I accepted
her call to mentorship; by now I had learned that correction is direction and feedback is love. She had done both in our conversation. It has been 11 years since our meeting, and she has been with me every step of my journey since then.

After the conference was over and our formal mentorship took off, Faith began to teach me how to bargain shop for high-end clothes. She always would say, “Girl, you can ball on a budget, honey.” She was a corporate leader in the city of Houston, so we began to have conversations about what it looks like to move to the next level. She often (re)minded me that I am not where I came from. She mentioned during our interview, “Ashá Jones was potential wrapped in chaos.” She explained:

Just speaking to you even for a very brief amount of time, you are intelligent, and that comes off from the very first syllable. But I met you as I was working in my position to kind of keep order in the meeting and you were late every day. Phone wasn’t charged. Just really did have it together. Lots of potential lots of purpose, just wrapped in a little chaotic package. (McClure, 2022)

Dr. McClure came into my life during a time when I was trying to figure out how to get to the next level, and she was a high-powered Black woman who was moving and shaking while the navigation systems were plagued with institutionalized racism against Black women. Over the years, she has spent time helping me how to navigate and understand political systems and organizations while making sure that I kept my focus on the main goal, whether that was working on my Ph.D., my work environment, or my personal relationships. Dr. McClure became my sugar and spice in life. When I was doing well, she sent words of encouragement and if I was struggling sent, she sent words of affirmation that affirmed who was and where I was.

**Mentor Snapshot: Brionne.**

In 2020, I was out on medical leave from work because my mental and physical health had completely tanked. I had been navigating land mines in the workplace for the last 3 years,
and I was over it. I was in a room listening to the Clubhouse App, and this mighty woman of God came on the line and was praying. They asked if anyone needed prayer, and I raised my hand. Something happened with the app, and people couldn’t get through, but my name was called to be prayed for. I explained briefly what was going on with me and how I really struggled from rejection from my mother and being pushed out in the workplace. Brionne came on the line, and she began to pray. As she prayed, I felt my mind begin to shift and I realized that I was more than a conqueror—I was built to move forward in life.

After she prayed for me, she explained to me that she would love to do one-on-one mentoring with me that was faith-based, and she talked to me about how she overcame her mental struggles from her years of being in toxic environments. Brionne encouraged me in a way that was different from all of my other mentors: She helped me to understand that even believers and followers of Christ struggle with mental health issues. She helped me to unpack the shame of my depression, and she helped me to breathe again.

During our Zoom interview, Brionne zoned in on all the mental health issues she faced, that I faced, and that other Black women faced. She made it clear that Black women struggle the most and are always forced to carry the weights of the world on their shoulders. Ultimately, they have no place for themselves to release those burdens. She shared:

I think the most critical support that we can use but don’t use often is mental health. Those there’s a Black girl therapy.com. I think that there’s so many just avenues where we can tap into getting healing through mental health, mentorship, all of the things that are available to us that are accessible, I think we don’t use enough of because we as Black women are trained to kind of carry the world on our shoulders. So we are used to being the resource as opposed to grabbing from others to be a resource for it. So I think that that is one of the major resources that I think we should grab a hold on, but you’re not doing it. (Brionne, 2022)

Because I was at a period in my life when I was trying to reconcile my feelings of being a Black woman of Christian faith and thinking that I always had to show up as a strong Black
woman and not display any emotion of fear, the mentoring I had from Brionne has had a significant impact on my life. This goes back to the time my grandma told me that I was a “g” and that “g’s” don’t weep; instead, they thug up. Her guidance allowed me to make the transition from being a Black girl to a Black woman. For little Ashá to develop into who I am now, Brionne’s mentorship released me to move forward.

**Mentor Snapshot: Ethel Cuff Black**

I was wasting time on Facebook in July of 2021, and while there, I came across a post written by Dr. Ethel Cuff Black. She was looking for an admissions professional with experience in higher education to fill a remote consulting position. This person would assist in the development of recruitment programs for prospective Black students. I communicated with her via message and submitted my application for the position. The application process included both a writing sample and an interview with Dr. Cuff Black.

During the process, Dr. Cuff Black, who was a Black woman and a top leader at her institution, was very encouraging. From the moment we first spoke with her, it was abundantly clear that one of her primary goals in life is to serve and protect Black women, both inside and outside of educational institutions.

During our Zoom interview, she shared with me her deep unconditional love for Black girls and women, as well as the fact that she can hold the position she has today thanks to the contributions of other Black women. She talked about how, as a Black woman in a top position at an organization, she has never experienced true peace, but she realized that she was sitting in the right place at the right time to hold the power that will make a difference for other Black women now and beyond her time in the position. She talked about the ways she hopes to make life simpler for other Black women who come after her. She revealed:
I know for fact, not what I believe not what I think I know for a fact that my advocacy has made things better for other Black women at hat, including those that may never meet. And that sits well with me. I know because I’ve had to fight every day. For 10 years, I’ve never had a moment’s peace in a predominantly white institution where I’m the first ever in the history of the college. First ever Black woman VP. I’ve never had a moment of peace. But I do know that I’ve made it better and easier for those Black women coming behind me who I may never meet. (Cuff Black, 2022)

Dr. Cuff Black (re)newed my hope in Black women in leadership, especially after my experience with Black women in leadership on my last campus. She has helped me to understand my intersections as a Black woman, a Black woman of faith, a Black Ph.D. student, and a Black leader. She was open and shared true feelings about how I can lead at a higher level as a Black woman; more importantly, she vowed to ensure that I would not be terrorized by systems of whiteness or people who supported white supremacist ideologies. During our meeting, she explained:

I vowed to you that those things would not happen at the institution, practice not perfectly, but there would be no way that I would allow you to be terrorized by white supremacists, racists and self-hating and people of color. But I am proud to say that you have not experienced a lot of racial terrorism, and you’ve not had a lot of microaggressions or aggression since you’ve been on the team. (Cuff Black, 2022)

During my first week of working on her team, a white woman on the team continually talked down to me while explaining how she taught remedial reading and writing courses to students who did not understand how to read or write. During her training, she trained me as if I needed additional assistance while continuing to point out that she taught remedial courses at the college. I called Dr. Cuff Black about it, and she believed me the first time I told her. Dr. Cuff Black belief in me as a Black woman was so profound and rare because it had not been done in other places. Dr. Cuff Black explained that Black women needed to be supported, and that started with believing their stories and what they had to say. She shared:
I say all the time and I live this is. Believe us! Yes. While some of us lie and make up things, the overwhelming majority of us do not, because why would we want to make up our trauma when our lived experiences are bad enough. I tell people, I don’t have to make up anything. But truth is worse than anything I could possibly fabricate. Right. So believe us, protect us, advocate for us. As a Black woman, VP, the Black woman on my team should feel safer than me than they ever had before. And I say that and I believe that. If you don’t, I don’t need to be in the position. (Cuff Black, 2022)

Dr. Cuff Black helped me to understand that I was so much more than just a mentee—I was a mentor myself. She has encouraged me to stand in all of my intersections as a Black woman.

Summary

The mosaic of me that was explored throughout this chapter is a (ref)lexive encapsulation of the critical incidents I experienced and the critical supports I received through memos, music, and mentorship that have played a role throughout my life, from Black girlhood to Black womanhood. These critical incidents and critical supports have helped shape who I am today as a Black woman. This chapter investigated the one-of-a-kind and close-knit discourse relationships that have recurred throughout my life and created a pathway for me to investigate emerging themes and issues that needed to inform how I, as a Black girl and now as a woman, needed to be critically mentored. The next chapter uses autoethnography and literature that I have already mentioned in an effort to provide recommendations and healing that possess the potential to shape and change the experiences of Black girls and women.
Chapter 5

SOMEBODY ANYBODY HEAR MY BLACK GIRL SONG

During my lifetime, I have witnessed the dominant culture stifle the voices of Black girls and women and treat them poorly. As I progress in my professional development as an educator, as a Black woman, and as a Christian, I am becoming aware of the fact that I will be presented with new opportunities on a daily basis to fight against oppression and the narrative that Black girls and women are angry. For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf is a book written by Ntozake Shange (1977), and it is one of my very favorite books. As a Black woman who has a deep love for God, there is one particular quote that has stayed with me:

somebody/ anybody sing a Black girl’s song bring her out to know herself to know you but sing her rhythms carin/ struggle/ hard times sing her song of life she’s been dead so long closed in silence so long she doesn’t know the sound of her own voice her infinite beauty she’s half-notes scattered without rhythm/ no tune sing her sighs sing the song of her possibilities sing a righteous gospel let her be born let her be born & handled warmly. (Shange, 1977)

Memos, music, and having a mentor were all important parts of my life as I went through school. They helped me develop a positive view of myself as well as a sense of my racial and cultural identity. Mentorship created a space for collective liberation efforts for me as a Black girl and woman by empowering me to resist hegemonic practices rooted in racism, sexism, and classism, which have contributed to the oppression of me as a Black girl and woman by labeling me as angry and pushing me out of the academy and society (Darder, 2015, 2017, 2018; Weiston-Serdan & Sánchez, 2017; Wright, 2016).

I was a Black girl who has now become a Black woman, who was a mentee and is now transformed into a mentor. As I think back on my life, I realize that it is important for me to tell my story loudly to challenge the many times that institutionalized racism built into educational
systems and society as a whole has tried to erase or disenfranchise me as a Black woman with many the different intersections I carry.

This chapter reveals the major themes that surfaced from my memo entries, my analysis of music lyrics, and my conversations with mentors as I transitioned from Black girlhood to Black womanhood—during my middle school years, high school years, college life, work life, and current Ph.D. journey. My research drew inspiration from diverse frameworks, including Critical Race Theory, Critical Mentoring, Black Feminist Thought, and Critical Autoethnography. In this chapter, I investigated the concepts behind the Black Girl Mosaic Mentoring Model as a recommendation for assisting Black girls and women in the educational complex and society.

**Overview of Findings**

The data sources included 10 memos, 11 interviews with mentors, 14 songs, and 10 critical analyses of the themes. The following uncovered six main themes: (1) development of one’s voice, (2) self-actualization, (3) transformation, (4) identity, (5) community, and (6) resilience. Each theme was linked to the theories of Critical Race Theory, Critical Mentoring, Black Feminist Thought, and Critical Autoethnography. Each of the themes served as a bridge to help understand how I navigated my critical incidents and the critical support I received on my journey from Black girlhood to Black womanhood. The themes that emerged allowed me as a Black woman to be held accountable for my words and provide space for my marginalized voice to speak through the themes (Boylorn, 2008).
Emergent Themes

Figure 3

Emergent Themes

Development of Ashá’s Voice

Finding one’s own voice can be a challenging endeavor for anyone, but for Black girls and women, it can be especially trying. Because of this, it is vital to provide Black women with a place to live, an outlet for their creative expression, and freedom from overt obstacles and being undermined by sexism, racism, and classism, among other devices used to stifle the creative energies and voices that Black girls and women carry. Black girls and women need a
safe space in which they are encouraged to raise their voice and speak their truth in order to be effective in breaking down the barriers that stand in their way.

As I dug deeper into the data in my findings, I found that I needed to go through the process of naming the world I was navigating. This was especially true in terms of understanding my positionality in relation to the intersections I held as a Black girl and now as a Black woman, which include race, gender, racial, and class identity. The evolution of my voice was the first major theme that came to light while I was conducting my autoethnography. This topic was gleaned from the memos, music, and interviews with my mentors that I conducted within my study.

The conceptual framework provided me with the opportunity to examine the subcomponents of my voice, which include: (a) musical self-reflection through understanding my voice through music, (b) self-reflection through counternarratives, and (c) self-reflection through my own memos. These were made abundantly clear by my autoethnography, particularly when I began to examine critical incidents within my memos, the mentor interviews, and the music lyrics. In Critical Incident #1, my voice was stifled by white classmates and white educators when I tried to share my story, in addition to being labeled angry, being pushed out of the classroom, and being subjected to racism within educational systems.

Administrators and white classmates within the system concluded that they would label me, even though they were unaware of who I was. I was putting a lot of effort into finding the right words to describe who I was. In addition to this, the individuals who held power in the classroom had been teaching history that was not only problematic but also rooted in white supremacy and power. Because of this, I was forced to advocate not only for myself, but also for those enslaved Africans who came before me.
Patricia Collins (2013) talked about how her race helped define some aspects of her world, and she was aware that other people were evaluating her based on those definitions. She talked about how she felt insignificant and then went silent. She “tried to disappear” and hide from the experiences she had previously lived through. To a large extent, she was giving her consent for the silencing of her voice (Collins, 1990). Collins came to the conclusion that she would make use of her suffering to discover her voice, talk and write about the experiences she had lived through, and do so by employing both her physical voice and her written voice.

My memo entry #1 was Critical Incident #1: These Cats Don’t Know Me, as well as the lyrics to a song by T.I., which aided me in comprehending the ways as a Black girl, I was being renamed and enslaved by racism at the hands of white people in educational systems. In addition, they demonstrated how my voice was stifled at one intersection, whereas I was able to find my voice at another intersection. My voice has been granted the right to be employed in the process of transforming from master narratives to counternarratives in order to confront and highlight my perspectives within educational and societal systems.

I found that as a Black girl and now as a Black woman, I often acquiesced to silence and refused to share my story, name my harm, or advocate for myself. I chose to remain silent on purpose as a form of resistance to preserve my sense of peace, energy, and time (Johnson, 2022). While (re)reflecting and (re)reading through all 10 of my critical incidents, I discovered that I was keeping my voice buried from the outside world, but I was able to (re)member voice within my memo entries (Dillard, 2022). For instance, in Memo Entry #2 of Critical Incident #2, I found myself trying to use my voice to help my teachers understand the internal struggle of my silent tears, and I hoped they would allow me to use my voice and provide an opportunity for them to understand my voice.
During my interview with my mentors, Dr. McCarthy-Adams and Ms. Shabazz, both stated that the issue was not that I did not have a voice; rather, I did not know how to make use of the voice that I had.

During the second critical incident, the music mentor gave me some time to figure out how the lyrics of the song would interact with my voice. For example, in the song “So Many Tears,” I connected my story to the lyrics which, in turn, became my voice. Tupac cried out in the song because of the environment, and he talked about how he experienced life through his music. Tupac was engaged in a never-ending struggle with his feelings regarding his mother’s drug addiction and his father’s absence, all while contending with the reality that he was being held in prison for a crime he did not commit. Therefore, he utilized the power of the lyrics in his song to not only (re)flect but also (re)mind himself that his voice does matter and that he can use it in the way he wants to share his story with others. This is very similar to what I was doing in my journals, but also within my autoethnography overall.

Joan Morgan (1999) contended, “We need a voice like our music—one that samples and layers many voices, injects its sensibilities into the old and flips it into something new, provocative, and powerful” (p. 62). Music gave me the freedom to use my voice (Patton et al., 2022). In addition to this, I have the opportunity to (re)claim my voice and (re)assure others that I do, in fact, have a voice. As T.I. mentioned in the lyrics to his song, “You don’t know, Ashá.”

**Self-actualization**

The ability of an individual to realize their presumed untapped potential is what is meant by the term “self-actualization.” It involves an acceptance of the humanity of the individual in question, in additional to an appreciation of the person’s unique human potential. It also incorporates into its explanation that people are never disconnected from other humans.
(Goldstein, 1940; Jung, 1953; Maslow, 1993; Rogers, 1961). The process of self-actualization can be challenging, but it ultimately empowers Black girls and women to evolve into the individuals they were meant to be. Turbulence is the price one pays for flying high. The road to self-actualization is bumpy, but it is worth the turbulence along the way. Part of my journey from Black girlhood to Black womanhood deals with turbulence. I understand that Ashá has been in the process of becoming, and her beginning was never meant to be her end. The Bible highlights that a person’s end is better than the beginning: *The end of something is better than its beginning. Not giving up in spirit is better than being proud in spirit* (Ecclesiastes 7:8, New Life Version).

Part of the turbulence is knowing who you are and where you come from. Dr. Evans-Winters (2019) explored the idea that Black girls and women can (re)construct and co-construct their values, ethos, and worldviews that have helped to sustain their cultural knowledge, rituals, and traditions of who they are.

Black girls and women have the right to know the truth about themselves, and to know a truth they can embrace that allows them to push back and resist the master narratives that institutions of racism have to say about them. Furthermore, it requires Black girls and women to “agitate” toward (re)membering their way to freedom while (re)membering they are Black on purpose for a purpose (Dillard, 2022), because knowing who one is the spirit of Black girls’ and women’s self-work.

The second major theme I identified in my data was self-actualization. Self-actualization refers to the ability of an individual to reach an assumed innate potential. As sexism and racism continue to have an effect on Black girls and women, they are left with the desire to create a context in which they can both create individual efforts for self-actualization that are meaningful and remain connected to the larger world of the collective struggle that links to self-(re)covery.
and political resistance. As a direct result of this, Black girls and women are provided with the opportunity to realize their humanity and the potential for human potential that resides within them (hooks, 2015). There are distinct critical incidents in my life I have gone through that could have resulted in a number of negative iterations. On the other hand, I was born with the innate capability to develop into a different version of myself, unrestricted by the expectations of either my family or society at large (hooks, 2015).

Self-actualization offered me with the opportunity and the tools to (re)concile with the reality that not only was I able to understand myself, but I could also establish myself as a whole person (Smith et al., 2021). My memos gave me the ability to (re)flexively look inward as well as outward, enabling me to comprehend who I was in connection to the words I had written in my journals. In addition, with the help of mentors, I was able to learn how to make the necessary adjustments in order to (re)cognize the inner strengths and growth areas while (re)evaluating my skills and experiences in life in order to find a path through the labyrinth that is in the educational complex. I was able to process my lived experiences as a Black girl and woman who experienced an onslaught of life changes that were both positive and negative because self-actualization gave me the space to do so. My ability to heal and process the stress that I have experienced throughout my life was greatly assisted by my capacity for self-(re)flection and self-actualization (Smith et al., 2021).

Throughout several of the critical incidents, I identified areas in which I used self-actualization to define my potential. The first critical incident comes from Critical Incident #1, where I tell Cami from my class that I am not a “nigger.” I was taught not to accept being called that by white people. Critical Incident #2 delves into how I (re)cognize that I am living in a house with multiple seeds of dysfunction, as well as how I can connect Tupac’s lyrics to why I
have so many tears in my heart but am not allowed to cry them. Within these two incidents and
the lyrics, I understand that my potential is greater than where I currently sit in my lived
experiences. Within Critical Incident #2, I gain a better understanding of what my name truly
means and what I will be called. My name was Life and Hope. My name is Ashá. Knowing who
one is and being able to name oneself is a choice I made that helped me not succumb to the
emotional suppression or expressions I should have had, navigating familial dysfunction and
institutional violence within systems of education (Patton et al., 2022).

I am able to (re)reflect and understand that I am in dysfunction but not the dysfunction at
1488 Douglas Street, Ogden, UT 84404, and throughout Critical Incidents #1 to #4. Ms. Shabazz
was hugely beneficial in helping me be delivered from what people said about me, which is why
she would constantly (re)mind me, “Black girl, Black girl, Black girl, (re)member who you are.”
The fact is that I was able to finally use self-actualization to deliver me from being labeled,
silenced, and pushed out while experiencing racism in and out of the classroom. As a result of
my self-actualization, I was able to lose myself in music and use school as a safe haven.

At school, I was seen and heard, even if it was negatively, by being suspended or told to
leave the classroom. Ms. Shabazz saw past the dysfunction and saw my intelligence and my
ability, which gave me a great understanding that something was inside of me, even though at the
time I could not articulate it. In my spirit, as the scripture I mentioned above said, “my ending
was better than my beginning.” Tupac stated in his lyrics, “Back in elementary, I thrived on
misery, left alone, I grew up amongst a dyin’ bread, inside my mind couldn’t find a place to rest,
until I got that thug life tatted on my chest.” My rest came when I realized that self-actualization
was that “thug life” tatted on my chest because self-actualization helped me to not only
(re)cognize but understand the potential residing in me, not only as Black girl, but now as a Black woman.

The first time I can (re)member being told that I could go to college and that I could attend a college in which other Black people held some of the same intersections I held was in Memo Entry #2 in Critical Incident #3, through the mentorship of Ms. Shabazz. In addition to this, I started to consider that attending college was in my future. Ms. Shabazz helped me to understand that, yes, I had problems that happened to me, but she only (re)minded me that my problems were a part of my identity, which additionally guided me in altering the narrative I had formed about myself. I understood that as a Black girl and now woman, it was important for me to embark on the journey toward self-actualization, and mentorship was critical to my navigation of the educational complex and society (Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008).

**Identity**

The memories, experiences, relationships, and values that contribute to the formation of a person’s sense of self are all included in the concept of identity. This synthesis produces a consistent sense of who one is throughout time, even when new parts of one’s identity are developed and integrated into the person’s identity over time. When I first met Dr. Shabazz, I didn’t understand why she would say this every time we connected: “Black Girl, Black Girl, know who you are! Ashá, your name means hope and life; remember that!” She was making sure I knew who I was because if I understood that, then I would eventually realize who I shall become. Ms. Shabazz and my grandmother would say these words to me. Black girls and women are owed both emotional and psychological safety, and it is equally important for them to be willing to see themselves as a treasure (Delano-Oriaran, 2021). Black girls and women need safe spaces in which they can explore their identities through the lenses of their race, gender,
socioeconomic status, status, physicality, sexual orientation, disability, and religion as components of the people they are meant to be.

Dr. Weiston-Serdan (Weiston-Serdan & Sánchez, 2017) uncovered the concept that critical mentoring of Black girls who develop and become Black women requires mentors to help them construct powerful identities while gaining a deeper understanding of their lived experiences and who they are and how they show up in the world. Crenshaw (1991) contended that there is a need to support positive racial, gender, and class individual identity development at all stages of Black girls’ and women’s lived because developing identity politics that do not conflate or ignore intragroup differences is difficult.

The third major theme that surfaced from my data was my individual identity. As I dissected my various lived experiences within the data, identity showed up in all the critical incidents. The first time we saw my identity show up was in Critical Incident #1, and it was a negative identity. The education system named me angry, and my grandmother named me a thug. When I (re)cognize my identity in Critical Incident #2, three points are clearly apparent: the first is that my grandmother is on the phone, and she is telling someone on the phone what my name means. She is explaining that my name has value and that I am worthy of hope and life. Second, a piece of my identity is that I am a soldier, and I began to (re)concile that I am a soldier in the war field of my lived experiences.

Given Ms. Shabazz and her constant (re)minder, “Black girl, Black girl do you know who you are?” I came to terms in that same incident with the fact that another part of my identity is that I am a protector. I am protecting the drugs in my home by going to the bathroom in the hopes I can hide what is there so my grandmother does not go to jail. In Critical Incident #4, we see the protector show up again as I feel the guilt and shame of not being able to protect Bebe
from the white man and my aunt Ginn. In my mentor interview with Ms. Shabazz, another part
of my identity showing up was that I am a fighter.

As I struggled to understand dysfunction at home and school, I decided that fighting in
and out of the classroom would protect me from rejection of who I was as a person. So, I lived
up to that identity. In Critical Incident #5, I connect with Dr. H, who teaches me that I am a
Black queen and I have full authority to walk into my identity. In Critical Incidents #6 and 7, I
discover that I am soror, which means sister; in the same incident, I become “othermother” to my
younger brother.

It became abundantly clear to me as I (re)listened to the mentor interviews with my nine
mentors that when they first met me, I had a difficult time figuring out who I was as a result of
the many things that had impacted me in the past. For instance, during my mentor interview with
Dr. Ben X, he mentioned that, as he (re)flected on our first interaction, he noticed that I was
pondering who I was at the time and who I would ultimately become (Ben X, 2022). His insight
enabled me to (re)flect on and (re)flexively examine my inner self, which permitted me to
comprehend and step into my full potential of who I had been called to be. This was particularly
helpful for me at a time when I was having trouble making sense of my identity. During my
process of (re)analyzing the mentor interviews, I became aware of an overarching theme of
identity that I was working through and attempting to gain insight into (Burnett et al., 2022).
Bishop Truth explored the idea. When he first met me, I had a clear understanding of my outside
identity and the world around me; however, as our informal mentorship progressed, I began to
understand my identity as something I carried on the inside of me (Truth, 2022).

Within this same critical incident, I became a mentor to the Ladies of Today, a local high
school team that I created for Black girls in the Utah community. In Critical Incident #7, my
spiritual identity and DNA change as I become a follower of Christ and am adopted in the family of God. I walked into another part of my identity as a public speaker to help Black girls heal in Critical Incident #8, and it was the first time I heard about my future identity as a Ph.D. student. Finally, in Critical Incident #9, I (re)cognize that I am a conglomerate of all of these identities and can fully walk into the call of each intersection of my identities.

Music allowed me to not only trace the possibilities of what it meant to be a Black girl or woman as I was searching for my identity, but also to be enough (Boylorn, 2016a). The lyrics of the songs, for example, allowed me to situate myself within the song and understand who was Ashá and all the intersections of her identity. The lyrics in “How to Survive in South Central” helped me identify that growing up on the streets was a part of my identity, but “Angels Watching Over Me” created space for me to understand my new identity in Christ (Tesfamariam, 2012). Unpacking the music allowed me to (re)flect on the lyrics and see how they related to who I was as a person. Second, the music lyrics enabled me to (re)flexively compartmentalize the lyrics and walk in full authority in all of the intersections that I carried.

As I dissect the mentor interviews and music lyrics, the song that connects the best to all my identities is “Can’t nobody hold me down.” My critical incidents were all intersections of who I was as Black girl and who I am as a Black woman. As Black girls and women understand the totality of the intersections of their identities, they can sing along with Puff and Mase: “Can’t nobody take my pride/Can’t nobody hold me down, oh, no. I got to keep on movin’.

Community

bell hooks (2021) explored the idea that love is a transformative labor that can assist communities in surviving and challenging oppressive imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist, and hetero patriarchal systems. hooks’ work focused on the intersections of race, class, gender,
and sexuality. The notion of love in community, as envisioned by hooks, examines the possibility that people can develop meaningful relationships with one another apart from romantic partnerships.

Dr. Cynthia Dillard (2022) proposed the belief that the very idea her life exists in the community and is guided by the principle of “I am because you are” as philosophy from the African proverb “Ubuntu,” which is woven into the fabric of this country (Dillard, 2022). Another major theme that emerged from my research was the importance of having a solid community of individuals to lean on for support. My transition from being a Black girl to a Black woman was significantly assisted by the growth of meaningful relationships.

The words “walk with the wise and become wise” are found in the Bible, which r(e)minds me once again of their importance of the right community (Proverbs 13:20). My memos, my music, my peers in my social groups, my family members, and the critical roles that community members played helped me survive educational and societal communities that were invested in white supremacist ideologies, which caused me to experience pushout, labeling, anger, seeking help, and being silenced.

Even though the experiences I had within the educational system gave me a skewed sense of belonging, I discovered a true sense of belonging within the steady and supportive community that either I created or that emerged naturally. My community was able to assist me in making sense of the experience of navigating the educational and social structures of society and the world as an outspoken Black girl and Black woman. My community was able to support me through both of these potentially dangerous experiences, which are common for Black girls and women who are navigating oppressive systems. While I was able to make it through them, the people who live in my community played an instrumental role in ensuring I was aware that my
safety could not be dependent on my fear of being in the company of white supremacists and Black people who conform to whiteness.

I was exposed to the negative effects of white supremacist ideologies when I was a Black girl and now a Black woman. However, I was unable to comprehend and make sense of it without the assistance of my community. I was a victim of this ideology. Key experiences of building, creating, and having community show up in my experiences of transitioning from being a Black girl to becoming a Black woman as I (re)examined the memos, music, and mentor interviews. Even though my family at 1488 Douglas Street was clearly dysfunctional, the first sense of community I had was my chaotic family. Even though it was complicated, distorted, and filled with the pain of generational pain, it was still a community, and there was love there, despite all the problems. The earliest indications of the existence of that community can be found in Critical Incident #1, which describes the circumstances under which my grandmother provided a home for me, my cousins, and my younger brother. At the time, my mother was incarcerated, and my two aunts were addicted to drugs and frequently in jail or engaging in prostitution.

My first experience with a positive community is Ms. Shabazz, who shows up in the community in Critical Incident #2. I am among my peers getting into a fight, and she stops me because she (re)cognizes something greater in me. Within this critical incident is the unpacking of the song “What about your friends?” by TLC. Ms. Shabazz demonstrates and embodies trust while reminding me of who I should be.

The lyrics from “How to Survive in South Central” give me the autonomy to evaluate the idea that “communities have rules, and if you step outside of them, you can get caught up,” but at the same time, in the same incident, my familial community shows up with my grandmother
explaining the rules of communities which are: (a) You die with the streets, (b) You die for the streets, or (c) You die because of the streets, which then confirm the music mentor’s statement in the song that “even the strong die in South Central.”

The (re)examining of Critical Incident #4 shows that music was my biggest support during this time. There was so much going on behind the walls at 1488 Douglas Street, and I was trying to (re)concile with the fact that my familial community was not one I could really trust. In this particular incident, I face the fact that my grandmother, who should have been a trusted adult to lean on for help, was the same one who allowed a mob of my other family members to attack me. When I dissect the lyrics “Will your friends be around, will they let you down?” the answer is that my family had disappointed me and could not be trusted.

As I continue to unpack Critical Incident #5, I can see that for my cousins Bebe and Cece, I was that family community who was there for them, and I felt the guilt and pain of not being their protective community member who could stop the molestation they were experiencing at the hands of a white man who was using his power to dominate the lives of Black girls as if he had right and agency over their bodies and their sexuality (Morris, 2018). Ms. Shabazz and my friend Chau both show up again as trusted community members at graduation and helping me for graduation.

Critical Incident #6 through #10 hold a conglomerate of community members who enter my life and support me through the next phases of my life. In Critical Incident #6, Dr. H arrives at Weber State University, where I see the first positive Black person in authority who works within the systems of education and society. Dr. H’s mentorship ranged from 1997 until now. His first encounter with me revealed that I needed community support, particularly from him and his wife. Dr. H’s mentorship helped me understand the tenets of racism, from being a student on
a college campus to becoming an administrator on a college campus. Tupac’s “Me Against the World” allows me to remove the mindset that it was “Ashá Against the World” as related to positive community mentorship.

During this critical incident, I see my college friends begin to develop on the college campus as part of my support system that led me from Black girlhood to Black womanhood. The next community I built was through my sorority, where I was introduced to a circle of sisterhood as a Black girl that would help develop my Black girlhood but also begin to shape my Black womanhood. Furthermore, my community of college friendships and our relationships grew deeper because they were now helping me with my brother. I am sensitive to calling it motherhood because I am not my brother’s mother; I am his sister, and the community of family is still intact. The song mentored by Sean Puffy Combs, “Can’t Hold Me Down,” helped me to understand that my community was solid, and they would hold me down, regardless of what I was facing. Critical Incident #9 depicts Dr. H’s departure from Weber State University as an administrator, but he was always a phone call away, allowing me to stay in touch with him and his family and stand in community.

There is a huge shift in my community that supports me. In this critical incident, I found out that Jesus loved me, and I became a follower of his word, which meant I was taking off my old self and putting on a new self. I was accepted into a community that I will be part of for the rest of my life on earth and eternally. The angels within the lyrics that I talked about earlier speak to me and let me know that I am his, as is anyone else who chooses to accept the call. My community was able to show me that there is a larger narrative to what God has planned for my life.
Through this shift, I was able to accept that life with God included both joy and pain, but no matter what I faced, the God I had served would be the ultimate protector and provider, showing me the purpose for my life and how I would become a benefactor of His promises. This did not mean that I did not continue to face struggles, but it meant I could look at my life through a different lens, knowing that I had a community of angels coming to my rescue when I called on them.

In Critical Incident #10, Dr. McCarthy invites me back into the community of learners, but at a higher level, suggesting that I would be a community member of Ph.D. recipients. This critical incident was a prophetic message to me that I did not understand at the time, but in 2023, I am still answering God’s call over my life while understanding how my community is developing.

Ashá’s Lyrics provide me space to (re)member and heal from the family community on 1488 Douglas Street, where I grew up. My last community work environment was toxic and dysfunctional, to say the least, and served as a (re)minder of the mob attack I suffered as a young Black girl. I also understood how to navigate the attack as a Black woman. I (re)alize that I had the power to fight back the mob attack in that place, but I relied on my community of mentors, my music, and my memos to understand how to navigate that space. Critical Incident #11 gave me the opportunity to enter the academy of a doctorate program and understand the pushout on the job, as well as to discover a new community of Black women, whom I call Sistas4Lyfe, who are part of my healing process. My newfound community gave me a wake-up call, and I was rejuvenated by my wake-up call. As the song so aptly stated, “Wake up everybody no more sleepin in bed. No more backward thinkin time for thinkin ahead” (Gamble & Huff, 1975).
**Resilience**

The final theme, and perhaps the most pronounced theme that emerged, was resilience, which really addressed the nature of the relationships I had, not only with my critical incidents but also with my critical supports through examining memos, music lyrics, and experiences with mentorship as I navigated from Black girlhood to Black womanhood. Resilience for me was the “process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, and significant sources of stress” (Goodkind et al., 2020). My ongoing practice of overcoming my lived experiences was called resilience. As a Black girl and woman who was experiencing discrimination and adversity along my journey, I employed a range of strategies to maintain my well-being in oppressive systems. Some of those responses aligned with the dominant ideological expectations around how girls should act: follow the rules, work hard, ignore mistreatment, or get out your feelings (Goodkind et al., 2020). As Monique Morris (2018) declared, “When the way of the world includes a general lack of cultural competence and an aversion to valuing the unique contributions of gender, these [latter] survival characteristics are degraded and punished rather than recognized as tools of resilience.”

Along my journey from Black girlhood to Black womanhood, navigating the systems of institutionalized racism required me to have a strong capacity for resilience, which was the secret to my success (Morris, 2016). To this point, Morris asserted that there are seven Cs essential to building resilience in Black girls who will eventually become Black women. These seven Cs include: (a) competence, (b) confidence, (c) connection, (d) character, (e) contribution, (f) coping, and (g) control. These are tools that can be used to empower oneself, establish boundaries, and fight stress (Delano-Oriaran, 2021, pp. 120–21). The Seven Cs and resilience are themes that emerged throughout all 11 of the critical incidents I went through, as well as in the
mentors’ interviews I conducted and the song lyrics I analyzed. All of these contributed to the formation of my resilience, which was necessary for overcoming the oppressive educational and racial structures embedded in society.

I see young Ashá fighting to show that she is competent and has the right to be in the classroom in Critical Incident #1, but when she addresses her white classmate, she is pushed out of the classroom by the white administrator, who tried to downplay the idea that she knew the truth about her ancestors. In Critical Incident #2, young Ashá continuing to fight to show that she is competent and has the right to be in the classroom.

My grandmother made us package drugs while she did them, and my inner voice always told me this was wrong and not something that I should be doing. But my character was being developed even in dysfunction because, as mentioned, 6 years later, I get custody of my younger brother, and that character of caretaker instilled in me at age 13 showed up again during my college years. This was always part of the plan over my life, according to God’s angels.

My coping mechanism is helping others and receiving their acceptance. However, I was still rejected by those who could not love me the way I wanted because they were unhealthy—and this is all part of developing resilience in Black girls who become Black women (Evans-Winter, 2014). Regarding T.I.’s music lyrics, I knew who I was at the time, but I was too preoccupied with letting everyone know who I was because I wanted to know my character, and it became a way of coping for me. If I could take the pain away from Grandma, my brother, or my friends, I would not have to face the dysfunction within me.

Connection is the next of the seven Cs that appears in my findings. Cami did not know me. She heard things about me. I could make that connection and communicate to Cami and the teacher while standing firm in who I was as a Black girl navigating oppressive systems. As T.I.
stated, “you don’t know me.” I was a Black girl trying to figure out systems of education entrenched in hate, all based on my skin color. Furthermore, white folks were trying to control my story rather than me controlling my story. Black girls understand that benefits and respect are earned through demonstrated responsibility and can make better choices while having a sense of control (Delano-Oriaran, 2021, p. 121). Throughout all of my critical incidents, I attempt to gain control of my lived experiences and give them a voice, whether protecting Bebe and Cece from the white man or stopping the police from taking my grandma to jail. Furthermore, I was always fighting.

As I discovered in Critical Incident #7 when I was compiling my findings after conducting an analysis of the lyrics of Nas’s song “If I Ruled the World,” contribution is an essential part of my life and plays a key role in the decisions I make. It was brought to my attention that if I were to become ruler of the world, I would break the chains of oppression that bind others, just as Ms. Shabazz and Dr. H had done for me. Black women and girls who are able to contribute to the well-being of others will be thanked for their contributions rather than condemned, as is currently the case (Delano-Oriaran, 2021).

As I unpacked and (re)examined the mentor interviews I had with Dr. hooks davis, Brionne, and Dr. Cuff Black, they all expressed that the person I am embodies and expressed a resilience that is vulnerable yet powerful and bold. Black women struggle to exude this as they navigate a sexist and racist educational complex (Kyrölä, 2017). Every one of my mentors remarked on my resilience and how I was able to persevere, despite the challenges that I faced in my life, and still emerge victorious. Each of the songs included in my critical autoethnography is significant because the music speaks to each of the critical incidents that I went through and brings my voice of understanding of how resilient I was then and how resilient I am today, even
though the educational complex and society tried to destroy me. My song of resilience was not only unique but additionally possesses the potential to offer other Black girls and women a safe haven from the storms they weather in life (Olson, 2020).

My ability to navigate the world with confidence was another factor that contributed to my development of resilience. Resilient Black girls and women need to be able to navigate the world with confidence in order to think creatively and recover from setbacks. Both Critical Incident #8 and Critical Incident #10 explored the idea that I am becoming more certain of my life’s purpose. I had a conversation with God, and during that time, he introduced me to his family and explained the significance of my life’s mission to me. On the other hand, one can see Dr. MCarthy releasing this new aspect of purpose over my life in Critical Incident #10, which is that I can become Dr. Ashá Jones (Delano-Oriaran, 2021, p. 121).

In Ashá’s Lyrics, I experienced both gaining and losing confidence due to my experiences of being silenced, labeled, and eventually pushed out. In this particular incident, I was facing a triple pandemic that hijacked my health, life, and well-being that I worked so hard to build. The trauma of COVID-19 and the social unrest impacted my mental health more than I ever experienced. I, like Tupac, had taken five shots and survived. My five shots were racism, pushout, silencing, labeling, and needing help. It is important to note here that these five major themes are ever-evolving in the lives of Black girls and women and are intimately engaged in a dialogic relationship with one another (Darder, 2018). My resilience allowed me to take the hits but not succumb to the shots of racism, pushout, silencing, labeling, and needing help. In the words of Tupac, I took them five shots and they couldn’t drop me. I took them and smiled because I am resilient.
The purpose of the following mentor model is to articulate the critical incidents that I went through while examining the critical supports I gained as I made my way from being a Black girl to being a Black woman who successfully navigated several systems of education and society. The conceptual framework of the model was derived from a combination of Black Feminist Theory, Critical Race Theory, Critical Mentoring, and Autoethnography. While I was considering potential topics for future research, I worked to ensure that Black girls and women have ample opportunities for success in educational institutions and throughout society.

The Black Girl Mosaic Mentor Model (BGM3) is the name of the model, which incorporates mentors, music, and memos in its framework. The development of this model required the establishment of meaningful relationships between the mentee and the mentor (Acosta, 2018).

As a result of my research, I was able to talk about how memos, music, and mentoring were critical supports as I navigated being silenced, labeling, needing help, encountering pushout, and understanding institutionalized racism. With the help of memos, music, and mentors, I was able to not only find my voice but also get to know it and realize how strong I am. I was able to (re)claim myself spiritually and physically. The recognition that I had a community who was always there for me, no matter what, helped me walk in the direction of self-actualization. This led me to realize that I was worthy of being educated and I was loved both inside and outside of the educational system.
M³ = Memos, Music, and Mentoring

*Memos*

Memory comes, first, in terms of “carrying out” the subject’s autoethnographic voice through memory narratives, which are also known as journaling and (re)flective writing. (Brockmeier, 2009). Morrison (1995) proclaimed that writing is not only “thinking and discovery and selection and order meaning, writing is also awe and reverence and mystery magic” (p. 92). Self-reflection provided me the opportunity to create a platform from which I could gain understanding of my lived experiences and the critical incidents I faced and how writing as a critical support helped me navigate society as a Black girl and now as a Black woman. It also afforded me the opportunity to (re)collect my good and bad lived experiences (Dillard, 2000).
In my memo exploration, I was able to explore my brokenness, my hopes, my joys, my confusions, my love interests, and my achievements. As a Black girl and a woman experiencing my intersections, racism has left me in a space where I did not think I could get back up again. As a young Black girl, I went through so much trauma that it left me struggling to trust people; thus, I began writing in my journal because I knew my journal could never violate me mentally, verbally, or physically. I had a place where I could dump all of my feelings without fear of retaliation. Writing freed me to look at the intersections of my identities, and afforded the grace to heal, laugh, forgive, and take social action (Collins, 2019). I discovered that writing authentically allowed me to (re)claim control of my identities in a world where my identity as a Black girl and woman was constantly under attack (Smith et al., 2021).

Music

*I’m all the way up. Nothing can stop me, I’m all the way up* (xclusive et al., 2016). Being born in chains did not stop my destiny. Being rejected by my mother did not stop me. Being called a bastard did not stop me. Being called unruly did not stop me. Being publicly humiliated did not stop me. *I’m all the way up.* The Jim Crow laws of my ancestors did not stop me. Being told to package drugs at 10 years old did not stop me. Being called fat and ugly my entire childhood did not stop me. Being violently beaten by family members did not stop me. Seeing my little cousin being sold to a white man did not stop me. *I’m all the way up.* Being in and out of school suspension for 324 days of my K-12 experience did not stop me! Being labeled did not stop me. The wrong mentors did not stop me. *I’m all the way up.* Growing up in a drug-infested house did not stop me. Never meeting my biological father never stopped me. Losing my job did not stop me. The professor who told me I should not be in a Ph.D. program did not stop me. *I’m all the way up.* Folks turning their backs on me did not stop me. The mob did not stop me. The
white folks who thought they had the power did not stop me. *I’m all the way up.* Getting custody of my little brother when I was 20 years old did not stop me. Those white girls who lied to the police about me did not stop me. My grandpa Tre did not stop me. My mom did not stop me. The performative Black folks on that campus did not stop me. *Nothing can stop me! I’m all the way up* (Edsclusive et al., 2016).

The power of autoethnography lies in the fact that it helps me to remember that literally nothing that was meant to stop me or could stop me, and artists like Fat Joe, Remy Ma featuring French Montana, and Infared remind me of this. By silencing the master narratives, autoethnography allows me to embed my complicated, multilayered, and multifaceted story as epistemology in order to demonstrate the reflexivity of the lived experiences I have encountered. I can shed light on the connection between my story, my voice, and the micro instances and micro implications of my lived experiences. The emerging themes that were explored have implications for all Black girls and women in education and society on multiple levels, including the theoretical, the practical, and changes to policy to create change in systems of education and society. *I am all the way, Nothing can stop me* (Edsclusive et al., 2016).

As I mentioned earlier in the study, music serves as an “expert witness” and mentor in the lives of Black girls and plays a critical role in understanding their stories (Love, 2012). As I navigated the experiences of being a Black girl and a Black woman, I found that listening to music helped me develop a positive sense of self while also understanding the totality of who I was, who I am, and who I shall become. These experiences engage collective efforts toward liberation by facilitating the development of consciousness that empowered me to resist master practices rooted in racism, sexism, and classism. This resistance enabled me to break free from
the oppression to which I had been subjected throughout my life (Darder, 2015, 2017, 2018; Weistos-Serdan & Sánchez, 2017; Wright, 2016).

Listening to music for me is more than just listening to a dope beat, as I have realized now that I’m older. I can critically examine the concept of music through the lens of community cultural wealth in order to change systems of oppression that Black girls and women face. As a Black woman, I was in search of clarity and peace of mind, and the critical support I understand, heal, and receive through and from music.

**Mentoring**

Through the mentoring process, individuals I trusted first instilled knowledge and success in my mind as a Black girl and woman, which in turn helped to build my self-esteem (Morris & Perry, 2017). Second, mentors are able to provide Black girls and women with the necessary support and structure they require (Roses & Randolph, 1987). Black girls and women can learn from these role models to value the cultural capital they bring to schools and to society as a whole (Yosso, 2020).

When Black girls and women are aware of who they are and what they possess, the quality of life for Black girls and women in the educational system improves (Yosso, 2020, p. 70). To improve relationship building and provide assistance to Black girls who are enrolled in the educational system, it is possible to establish connections with mentors who offer support outside of the classroom (Everett et al., 2016).

\[C^4 = \text{Connections, Clarity, Community, Creativity}\]

**Connections**

We frequently underestimate the degree to which we require connections, failing to recognize that they are exactly what enable us to form communities with other people. This is
important for Black girls and women to successfully navigate the educational system through their lived experiences, their “joys and pain, sunshine and rain,” to borrow a phrase from Rob Base, which is essential for them to have a sense of connection with others. In addition, Rob Base investigated the concept that it takes two people “to make a thing go right.” The development of Black girls and women, as well as their perspectives on life, can benefit from the establishment of connections between communities.

In addition, creating a space where Black girls and women can connect not only their lived experiences but others provides an opportunity for development and growth. Furthermore, this aids Black girls and women to connect to the totality of who they are proposed to be in life. The intersection of oppressions, which are in part connected to who we are and who we shall become, is one of the components of Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1989). Black girls and women have the ability to connect with other Black girls and women who have experienced similar forms of oppression within the context of education systems and broader society. As a result, connections are established between Black girls and women and their shared life experiences. Connection unlocks the key to possibilities for Black girls and women; after all, “It takes two to make a thing go right.”

Clarity

The colonizing ideologies must be confronted by Black girls and women, and this can only be done by nurturing a critical consciousness (Smith et al., 2021). Simply put, we must combat widespread hatred by loving and accepting our Blackness in all of the complexities that Black girls and women possess. Black women require environments in which they can gain perspective on the ways they have been confined to institutional racism, sexism, and classism.
throughout their lives. Clarity is something that is not only required of, but also deserved by, Black girls and women.

The quality or state of having clear perception is what the online version of Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines as “clarity.” Clarity provides a space for Black girls and women to vocalize exactly what they are experiencing within the educational systems and, in turn, gives voice to that experience. In her book, Patricia Hill Collins (2005) advocated for Black girls and women to confront authority figures with the truth.

When Black girls and women have clarity, they can use the voice that God gave them to speak clearly to invoke change, not only for themselves but also for those around them and those who will come after them. This framework to telling the truth makes use of the power of ideas to challenge the power relations that already exist. On a metaphorical level, speaking truth to power conjures up images of altering the very foundations of social hierarchy, in which the less powerful take on the ideas and practices of the powerful; this is something I believe can be accomplished by Black girls and women when they have clarity (Collins, 2013).

Community

The dismantling of our minds and ideas about who we are starts with the way in which we perceive and interact with the community. bell hooks (2021) proclaimed, “To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work that we must continually do to undermine all of the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination.” Black girls and women want to find a space where they can make sense of their lived experiences of enduring racism and feeling the effects of being in “survival mode,” while also feeling safe. As a Black girl and woman, I was always looking for a safe community in which I could voice my feelings, whether they were anger, frustration, joy, or simply the desire to inquire about something.
It is essential for Black girls and women to have the experience of belonging. They need a location where they can go to get a sense of who they are in relation to the community. This is because of the nature of the racialized existence that Black girls and women live, the ways in which we are unique to both the positive and the negative acknowledgments we receive within and outside of our communities. According to Nikotris Perkins (2020, as cited in Acevedo, 2020), “there’s also their ability to create a loving community.” Black girls and women are able to move beyond merely surviving to thriving when the space of community is provided for them. Silvia (2021) noted, “community builds and sustains areas where Black girls and women still feel loved, welcomed, appreciated, and understand why they are important, even though they are still facing the world.”

**Creativity**

When Black girlhood and Black womanhood are represented in educational systems and in society, an element of artistry comes into play. Black girls and women are not just holders of creative energies; they are creative, and there is an artistry when Black girlhood and Black womanhood are represented. On the other hand, Black girls and women cease their creative endeavors when they face opposition and racism. They eventually acquiesce to silence. My inability to create was, in many cases, a direct result of the critical incidents I encountered, many of which had their origins in racism, labeling, pushout, and silencing. I did not want to change and shift environments with my creative abilities, which led to a loss of connection with the various communities to which I belonged. Consequently, I stopped the growth of the other Black girls and women behind me. As a result of the hostile and racially charged experiences I had throughout my life, which left me feeling incompetent and incomplete, I stopped creating. It has
become apparent to me that when I am unable to create, it has an effect not only on my identity but also on my culture and my community.

Black women and girls require a place where they are encouraged to imaginatively articulate something other than what the rules and evaluations demand of them (Patton et al., 2022). When Black girls are met with resistance to master narratives, it becomes difficult for them to generate their own counternarratives, they often give up and remain silent. Educational systems need to make room for Black girls and women to develop while taking into account all of the complex intersections that come with being Black. Black girls and women have enough respect for one another to push back on environments that create dominant power narratives while simultaneously shifting the current power arrangements to the point where there is no longer any oppression of Black girls and women (Patton et al., 2022). This will enable the creative minds of Black girls and women to flow freely, allowing them to mature into the natural seats of power they carry and hold.

**Summary: The Black Girl Mosaic Mentor Model**

Music, memos, and mentoring are all interconnected aspects of how I, as a Black girl and now a woman, navigated systems of oppression. They were also in constant dialogue with each other, which helped me to develop a strong sense of belonging as well as a place of healing and a place from which to move forward. I was able to find my voice after going through the experiences I did. Mosaic is an art form that is manufactured by an assortment of small pieces of colored glass, stone, or other objects that are put together to offer a pattern or picture—and so is a person’s life filled with pieces of experience and living.

Music, memos, and mentors are the elements that create a mosaic as an art form (Evans-Winters, 2019). This pattern or picture originates from the community of glass and stone that
weaves in the aspects of creativity, connection, and clarity; all of these elements put the mosaic into play for Black girls and women. This model event, what I call the Black Girls Mentoring Model (BGM³), creates a transformative experience with a focus on the participation of Black girls and women. Their narratives, their lives, and the lessons they have learned provide a bridge over the chasm of inequality and exclusivity that separates Black girls and women from opportunities and resources.

The mosaic disrupts the dominant narratives that a large number of Black girls and women have internalized and, as a result, gives them access to the knowledge, experiences, and coping mechanisms that have been honed through their own lived experiences. The mosaic serves to validate the shared experiences of Black girls and women, thereby transforming those experiences from invisible to visible, appreciated, and valued. This is done in recognition of the unrelenting obstacles that stand in the way of our existence in a world that is dedicated to stifling our voice as Black girls and women.

BGM³ is a transformative approach that aims to support the educational needs of Black women and girls. Components of this approach include the utilization of a politicized ethic of care, intergenerational love and dialogue, and constructive ways to bring about change for Black women and girls.

Implications

In this section, I discuss what I have learned from my autoethnography and from doing intimate work about myself that included memos, music, and mentors that involve my family and the communities in which I have lived, worked, learned, and explored. To begin, I discuss the effect that working on a dissertation has had on my own personal growth as well as any and all intersections of the communities that are a part of me. These communities include my family,
friends, classmates, and coworkers, as well as any and all “purpose” people I have met along the way. I talk about how difficult it was for me to tell certain parts of my story. To walk in truth and find healing, I share how some of my family members were upset with me for exposing years of family secrets that have allowed me to walk in truth and healing and destroy the generational curses over my family’s life.

**Ethical Implications**

I will be forever indebted to the stories from my memos, the music that I listened to, and the mentors I wanted to honor for helping me move from surviving to thriving (Love, 2020). All of these contributed to my success. I have a deep and abiding passion for the way that musical sounds and words are embedded in the songs. I could not have found my voice without music. My journey to discovering who I am was aided by music. By listening to music, I was able to escape the suffering and anguish caused by the events I had lived through. My mother was addicted to drugs, so she was unable to show me the love a mother has for her child. However, the lyrics of Tupac’s songs taught me the meaning of a mother’s love. The song “So many tears” opened my eyes to the fact that allowing myself to cry was not a sign of weakness. My mother and my father are music, and they always have been. Since music was my parent, it was a place where I could either sit on my mother’s lap and cry or lay my burdens down on the ground and let them go. I discovered that music could provide me with a secure environment within which I could cultivate my capacity for self-reflection. It is the setting in which I learned what my limits were and how far I could push myself. My biological mother and father were unable to fulfill the role of my mother and father, and they had no idea how to do so either. Music filled that void (Love, 2012, p. 63).
My memos gave me the opportunity to set myself free. My memos were a place for me to (re)reflect, laugh, and cry whenever I needed to. My pen is a powerful tool, as I learned from writing memos. In the book of Habakkuk, the Bible makes abundantly clear that the act of writing something on a stone constitutes the creation of a vision. Memos gave me vision and opened my eyes that there was much more for my life. My memos gave me the space to not only tell my story, but also to live my story, have experiences related to my story, and most importantly, to love my story. My mentors prodded me to move closer to my goals of life. My community of mentors stepped in to provide me with the unconditional love and support I required but wanted and did not receive from my biological family because I was unable to rely on them.

I tried to keep my mentors’, family members’, and friends’ identities as confidential as possible because I (re)alized there were risks associated with telling their stories as well as my own. As Ellis (2007) explained:

> When we write about ourselves, we also write about others. In so doing, we run the risk that other characters may become increasingly recognizable to our leaders, though they may not have consented to being portrayed in ways that would reveal their identity, or, if they did consent, they might not understand exactly to what they had consented. (p. 14)

As I (re)considered my decisions as a researcher and participant, I did not wonder if they were right; I knew they were right for the sake of the Black girls and women who come after me. Ashá Shellettee Jones needed and wished for relief from the agony at 1488 Douglas Street. My research study is (re)leasing the guilt and shame I have carried for 45 years. My autoethnography gave me the voice and peace I needed to command the storm of my lived experiences to pass; in fact, I finally told the oppressive storm that it had to pass through, and I did so by telling my story through my autoethnography.
Theoretical Implications

Working with Black girls and women has a number of ramifications, one of which is that our voices are finally being heard. “Nothing about us without us,” Weiston-Serdan and Sánchez (2017) asserted (p. 29). As a result, there is a renaissance of Black girls’ and women’s voices being heard without repercussions. For far too long, the voices of Black girls and women have been not only silenced, but also hidden in the fabric of research. We now live in an era in which Black girls and women are the quarterbacks on the field, dictating how they want to be heard within the research that is being conducted as a celebration and emancipatory practice that liberates not only theirs voices but also their lived experiences. There must be a shift away from master narratives and toward counternarratives that (re)recognize how the voices of Black girls and women are inextricably linked to the work required to dismantle oppression within educational systems (Freire, 2018; Weiston-Serdan & Sánchez, 2017).

Future Research

The Black Girl Mosaic Mentor Model focuses on critical incidents that Black girls and women encounter and is aligned with Critical Race Theory, Critical Mentorship, Black Feminist Theory, and Critical Autoethnography. Moreover, the model is centered on critical autoethnographic research. It will be helpful for future research endeavors to examine how Black girls and women navigate oppressive systems and educational environments through the critical support(s) they receive. The transition from Black girlhood to Black womanhood can be supported by the exploration of providing space for Black girls and women to connect to the community, create within the community, acquire clarity in the community, and build meaningful connections in the community.
My dissertation focused on how Black girls and women can find healing and growth through an understanding of the lyrics of the music that represents their lived experiences. They can heal and grow while they navigate the educational system with their pens and write their experiences in memos, even as they understand who they are with the help of trustworthy and supportive mentors who will hold them accountable and provide them with love, joy, and hope. For change to transpire for Black girls and women, they must be given high priority in research, policy, and discourse.

Conclusion

Out of the night that covers me, Black as the Pit from pole to pole, I thank whatever gods may be. For my unconquerable soul. In the fell clutch of circumstance. I have not winced nor cried aloud. Under the bludgeonings of chance. My head is bloody, but unbowed. Beyond this place of wrath and tears. Looms but the Horror of the shade, And yet the menace of the years. Finds, and shall find, me unafraid. It matters not how strait the gate, How charged with punishments the scroll, I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul. (Henley, 1875)

Journal Entry: January 12, 2023, 9:17 p.m.

Ashá, it’s not your fault that as a child you did not have the right support systems around you. It’s not your fault that your mother was raped and kept you and has hated you since her decision. Ashá, “real mentors” have had your back through it all. Ashá, the fake mentors were there to keep you grounded. Ashá, the guy who broke your heart was sent to show you the real heart you are supposed to be with. Ashá, you’ve never stopped, and you won’t ever until you leave the earth. Ashá, you held a 3.8 GPA in your Ph.D. program. Ashá Jones, your work is important and will change the lives of Black girls and women. Ashá, you become the Harriet of your research, go free the Black girl researchers. Ashá, you finally realized the strength that you carry. Ashá, it has been your faith that carried you! Ashá, you’ve tumbled but you’ve gotten back
up. Ashá, you did not crumble. Ashá, everything you needed was inside of you. Black girl! Black
girl remember who you are.

As a Black girl who has since matured into a Black woman, I have gone from being a
mentee to a mentor. Knowing how many times the institutionalized racist structures embedded
within educational systems and society at large have tried to erase or disenfranchise me as a
Black girl and now woman with multiple and complex identities, I know it is important for me to
amplify my story as I (re)flect on my journey (Dillard, 2022). Through my life experiences as a
Black girl and woman, I was able to develop navigation skills through music, memo writing, and
mentor support that would help me succeed in institutionalized spaces like schools, workplaces,
and neighborhoods (Collins, 1989).

My study investigated how I persevered in the educational system from being a Black girl
to becoming a Black woman. It will lay the groundwork for future research into how the lessons
I learned from my lived experiences may contribute to Black girls’ and women’s experiences in
educational systems and society. At the same time, my study will encourage Black girls and
women to recognize and understand the lived experiences they have had as Black girls and
women.

By eradicating racism and sexism in schools and other institutions, we can improve
opportunities for Black girls and women (Omi & Winant, 2015). It is time to get serious about
finally eliminating long-standing societal norms and institutions. Since Americans do not think
Black women and girls are in need of reparations, let us change the culture through education
and get back our “ten acres and a mule” (Derbigny, 2019). To achieve this goal, we must
improve the conditions under which our Black girls and women can enroll in and graduate from
colleges and universities, thereby creating a legacy of knowledge, access, inclusion, and equity for future generations (Bell, 2004).

Black women’s and girls’ narratives, both inside and outside the classroom, are crucial, and efforts should be made to encourage them to share their experiences so that they can find healing and success. Black girls and women need cheerleaders who will encourage them and remind them they are not in this alone. Black women need to know that telling their stories is a potent act that can bring about positive change in policy and society at large. As Sojourner Truth said, “Truth is powerful, and it prevails” (Truth & Stewart, 1994).
The Truth About Telling My Story

Writing my autoethnography was a challenging and difficult process for sure. There were many days when I was forced to stop writing because I was (re)remembering real-life events that occurred within my memos that triggered and brought up old trauma linked to new trauma. These memories occurred because the old trauma was linked to the new trauma. (Re)typing my life experiences brought up old wounds I thought I had healed, but as I did so, I realized that I had not really overcome them or dealt with them to the extent I thought I had. There were times when I found myself asking, “Ashá, why are you doing this to yourself? Why not just focus on writing about mentoring and advising Black girls and women exclusively? Why don’t we just switch gears and talk about something else?” As I was (re)thinking which memo entries to include in my dissertation, Critical Incident #5 was, in my experience, the one that caused the most lasting effects on me, and it was also the one that became a recurrent motif in various aspects of my life. My grandmother overheard part of our argument with my cousin, which resulted from the fact that I had finally worked up the courage to use my voice to fight back against him. She came in and told him and four of my other cousins to attack me with the help of an aunt, but then you see the same type of lived experience that appeared in Asha’s lyrics when I experienced a mob attack in the workplace for finally, what I say is, “popping back” rather than using my voice to defend myself from the mob attack in the workplace.

As I (re)flect on these two critical incidents, I am coming to the realization that the mob was powerless to destroy me. To paraphrase the lyrics to Tupac’s song “I Hit Em Up,” Tupac says, “Five shots couldn’t drop me; I took it and smiled” (Powell, 2020). Tupac is (re)flecting on the fact that he was shot five times, then took the shots and smiled after them. Like Tupac, I
faced the oppressive educational systems as well as my oppressive family, and I took five shots and still (re)mained smiling. Nevertheless, there was suffering hidden behind the smile—or perhaps I should say hidden behind the walls—and it was unseen suffering that I made the conscious decision to avoid. Tupac went through precisely the same in his life. All of the harsh words he used in his lyrics and the battle words he used in his songs were about his suffering. He was able to (re)lease his pain through the music he created by using his lyrics. I now have the same opportunity to (re)lease my pain, and much like Tupac, I am telling my research story through my pain in an effort to assist other Black girls and women.

**Reflexivity of Ashá’s Mosaic**

The ability to rely on the authority of one’s own lived experience is referred to as reflexivity, and as a Black woman, this ability provides a unique and important perspective when researching the lives of Black girls and women. To be (re)flexive in academic research, one needs to possess the ability to turn the attention or gaze of the researcher back on themselves (Pini, 2004). Allowing myself to take part in (re)flexivity in order to navigate between my own life and the life of me as the participant, I drew on my experience as a researcher in the field (Wall, 2006). I had to constantly consider my ever-changing identities and how they competed, connected, and contrasted with my memos, music, and mentors. I also had to think about how they all influenced me (Boylorn, personal communication February 2, 2023). I made use of (re)flexivity to maintain a connection to Ashá as a scholar, researcher, and Black woman who is also a part of the community.

While I was (re)writing my critical incidents from my memos and connecting the music and mentor interviews to the incidents, I found that I was listening to the songs that were connected to the memos or mentors. This helped me stay focused on this part of the research.
played the songs over and over again as I was writing up my findings to truly understand them on another level. This gave me the opportunity to be more (re)flective in my understanding of the data that I carried, as well as my own real-life lived experiences. Because of my self-(re)flexivity as a Black girl and now as a woman, I was able to make connections for my readers and let them see how they fit into the story, regardless of whether that was a positive. The overarching stories I told as both my own researcher and as a participant in the study allowed me to concentrate on myself both as the researcher and the participant. This is because the stories are about me, and I am the stories. I can make a connection between myself and the findings of the research.
References


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Appendix A: Interview Questions for Mentors

Which of the following best represents your racial or ethnic heritage? Choose all that applies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic White or Euro-American</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African American</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino or Hispanic American</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>East Asian or Asian American</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Asian or Indian American</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern or Arab American</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American or Alaskan Native</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Tell me about yourself
2. How do you know me? When did you meet me?
3. Who was Asha’ Jones when you met her?
4. Who is Asha’ Jones now?
5. How, as a mentor have you helped your mentee to find their voice?
6. What have been your experiences with mentorship in education?
7. What experience do you have in developing a relationship with a mentor?
8. What role has a mentor played in your academic, personal, and professional life?
9. What are the critical incidents you witnessed or supported me through?
10. What do you define as critical support that is consistently useful for Black girls or women?
11. Do you have a mentor?
   a. What is your relationship with your mentor like?
   b. How often do you meet with your mentor?
   c. How has that mentor supported you?
12. Tell me about a time you felt your mentor had your back?
13. Tell me about a time when you felt your mentor did not have your back?
14. Tell me about any times that you have difficulty communicating with your mentor about what you are experiencing or have experienced?
15. In what ways have Black girls and women been impacted while navigating their lived experiences?
16. How have you helped other Black girls or women navigate the impact of their critical incidents?

Bonus
1. Did you ever change mentors?
Exempt Verification

11-Oct-2022

Principal Investigator: Asha' Jones S
Co-Principal Investigator: Marva Cappello
Department: College of Education
Protocol Number: HS-2022-0196

Title: Black Girl Black Girl Holla and Let em' Hear You: An Autoethnographic Exploration Of My Experiences From Black Girlhood To Black Womanhood.

Dear Asha',

The proposal or proposed study amendment was reviewed and verified as exempt in accordance with SDSU's Assurance and federal requirements pertaining to human subjects protections within the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46.104). This review applies to the conditions and procedures described in your protocol or amendment. The determination of exemption is final and continuing review (Progress Reports) are not required for this study. However, if any changes to your study are proposed, you must submit an amendment and receive IRB certification that the study still meets exemption criteria (per 45 CFR 46.104).

Additionally, CITI training must be kept current in order to maintain compliance. Finally, please notify the Human Research Protection Program office at 619-594-8822 or at irb@sdsu.edu if your status as an SDSU-affiliate changes while conducting this research study (you are no longer a SDSU faculty member).

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Asst. Vice President
Research Support Services
Research and Innovation
San Diego State University  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM  
Consent form version date: October 6, 2022  
Appendix B


**Important things to know about this study**

I am inviting you to join this research study. The purpose of the research aims to study mentorship for Black girls and women who have endured institutionalized racism while navigating the systems of education and society.

Being in the study involves attending one virtual Zoom Interview for 30-60 minutes and one follow-up interview if needed. The study involves answering questions about your experience with mentoring, same-race mentoring, lived experiences, and academic success.

You do not have to join this study. This study will help researchers and educators understand the experiences of Black girls and women in education systems and society.

I will give you information about the purposes, procedures, risks, and possible benefits related to this study. I will explain other choices you have. We will also give you more information that you need to make an informed decision about joining this study.

The following information is a more detailed description of the study. Please read this description carefully. We want you to ask us any questions that will help you decide whether you want to join this study. If you join the study, we will give you a signed copy of this form to keep to remind you of what being in the study involves.
WHO SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS or Concerns?

Principal Investigator: Asha Jones
SDSU Department: College of Education
Address: 4515 55th Street, San Diego, CA 92115
Phone: (801)920-3570
Email: ajones6644@sdsu.edu

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Marva Cappello
SDSU Department: College of Education
Address: 5500 Campanile Dr., San Diego, CA 92182
Phone: (619)-594-5706
619(Email: cappello@sdsu.edu)

I AM INVITING YOU TO JOIN A RESEARCH STUDY

I am inviting you because I believe your story will help change the experiences of Black girls and women in educational systems and society. Up to ten participants will be included in the study.

Research is not the same as treatment, medical or psychological care, or therapy. The purpose of research is to answer scientific questions.

You do not have to be in this study. You are free to say "yes" or "no" or to drop out of the study after joining.

WHY AM I DOING THIS STUDY?

This study is being conducted to understand better the critical incidents I encountered while navigating the educational system. Second, the purpose of this research is to understand better how having a mentor helped me navigate various educational systems as well as society and how it may help other Black girls and women in the educational pipeline.

WHAT IS THE TIME COMMITMENT IF I JOIN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?

Your participation will last one month. This can include up to two virtual modality interviews. If follow-up is needed, there will be a second virtual modality interview scheduled. Each visit will last 30-60 minutes.

The research scientist could stop your participation in the research study at any time, even if you still want to be in the study. This would happen if:

- They think it is in your best interest to stop being in the study.
- You are not willing or able to do all the things needed in the study.
- The whole study stops.
If you stop being in the study, the information collected before you stopped being in the study will not be included.

**WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?**
As one of my identified mentors, you will be asked to participate in a 30-60 minute interview on Zoom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visit 1</th>
<th>Visit 2</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face to face via virtual modality Zoom interview</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face to face via virtual modality Zoom interview (follow-up if needed)</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total time 30-60 minutes</td>
<td>30-60 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WHAT ARE THE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH?**

Participants might disclose educational administrators, mentors, former mentees, and other stakeholders during the interview process. Participants may discuss incidents of racism, mistreatment, and oppressive behaviors within educational systems and society. All participants will be protected by assigning pseudonyms to the interview transcript. Participants will be told that they don’t have to participate in any part of the study and that they can change their minds at any time.

Because I ask personal questions about you, you may recall unpleasant events. You can refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. You may also elect not to participate at any time.

Even though I will keep information gathered during interviews private, there is a possible risk of loss of privacy.

**ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO PARTICIPATION?**

There are no personal benefits to being in this study. However, by participating in this research study, you are helping to provide information that may help science and society.

**WILL MY INFORMATION BE PRIVATE?**

I will keep your information private. However, there are things that the law does not allow us to keep private. If I think that a child or older person is being harmed, I am required to report any suspected harm to authorities.

All research records will be stored on a password-protected computer, and I will be the only person with access. All data on the password-protected computer will be encrypted to ensure maximum privacy.
Pseudonyms will quickly be assigned, and the coding sheet will be password protected. Stored data will include recorded Zoom sessions. Research data will be destroyed 5 years after the end of this study. I will use the information we learn for published articles, books, or presentations to other scientists, including audio clips from our conversations. I will keep your information private. Others will not be able to identify you in those papers or presentations.

**DO I HAVE TO JOIN THIS STUDY?**

No, you do not have to join this research study. Even if you agree to join, you can decide later that you don’t want to be in the research. If you choose not to join or later decide that you don’t want to be in the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**WILL I BE TOLD ABOUT THE RESEARCH RESULTS?**

I will contact you with the results of this study after it is completed.

**WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING IF I JOIN THE RESEARCH?**

n/a

**WILL I BE PAID IF I JOIN THE RESEARCH?**

You will not be paid to participate in this study.

**WHOM DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?**

If you have questions now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact Asha Jones at 801-920-3570.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or in the event of a research-related injury, you may contact Human Research Protection Program at San Diego State University (telephone: 619-594-6622, email: irb@sdsu.edu). At any time during the research, you can contact the IRB to ask questions about research rights, discuss problems or concerns, give suggestions, or offer input.

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE:**

The San Diego State University Institutional Review Board has approved this consent form, as signified by the Board’s stamp.

Your signature below indicates that the study team has explained the study to you and that you have read the information on this form. You have had a chance to ask any questions about the research. By signing this form, you agree to join the study. You have been told that you can change your mind and stop participating in the research at any time. I have provided you with a copy of this consent form. This form includes contact information about who to contact if you have questions.
San Diego State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Consent form version date: October 6, 2022
Appendix B

Name of Participant (please print)    Date

Signature of Investigator    Date

Verified
Exempt
11-Oct-2022
June 26, 1999

Yo, Journal! I am kind of sad I got a new job at another university and he won't be there for my senior year, but the school he will keep in contact with me. Well journal, something really cool happened you know how I have been going to church with [redacted] and her sister [redacted] for the last year. It has been really cool learning about God and his Son Jesus. I have learned over the last year that God sent his Son to die for me and He takes all my burdens. I also go to church with [redacted] sometimes and his church is cool, but all the people are like 100 years old. But the 2nd Baptist be poppin. All the black students from Weber go there.
They have fish fries for us once a month. That fish be so good. To be honest, I really only started coming to church because of the free fish. They also taught us that Jesus fed 5,000 people with two fish and ten loaves of bread. I think it was ten loaves. I probably should read more about that. However, it's really cool and I like going to church there. I learn lots of things about God. The young adult pastor is cool; we call him because he can mix music and play the drums. He's really cool. If we don't do our homework before Sunday School, he be yelling at us. I like how he teaches. He uses music.
We listen to and relate it back to scripture. Some of the older people at church don't like his style of teaching, but yo I love it. I sometimes just have to remember I am at church and I can't say the bad words. Tha th! (Jurnal) I think I am going to accept Christ tomorrow. I want to be baptized and have a forever home with E100. I think I am gonna do it. I will let you know tomorrow. Good night Journal! Hit you up later.
November 2, 1976

you journaled, I saw these black girls with blue and yellow on doing these dances in a line in the courtyard. They had a table set up and there were lots of black girls going up to it. I remember high school about black dancing, but I didn’t think we would have one at our school because mostly white people were here. But there were some white girls who went to these tables. Some white folks don’t want us to have nothing. They make white people on campus say we have tails. We go on over there ‘haha.’ Bural, I make myself laugh. Anyway, I went up to the tables and I asked some questions. They took me what you set me do.
Community service and get back to basic girl training. I was like, that's so cool, and they said if we got accepted, we'll do some chores in a line with them. Oh, and formal, wife was there, she is part of that group. Wife is so nice, she talked to me today, and she asked: 'Are you saying you're not going to church?' I just laughed. She said me if I joined I would have to wear a dress sometimes. Finally, I will wear the dress. That's stupid. Anyway, all going to church about it. My family sent it money for people who want to know more. Elite 722 were a man by the dollar. All the people are from up and down to see whether they can help. Many morning off.