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Black Women Family Childcare Providers' Roles as Community Mothers During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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BLACK WOMEN FAMILY CHILDCARE PROVIDERS' ROLES AS
COMMUNITY MOTHERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

by

Crystasany R. Turner

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ABSTRACT

BLACK WOMEN FAMILY CHILDCARE PROVIDERS' ROLES AS COMMUNITY MOTHERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

by

Crystasany R. Turner

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2020
Under the Supervision of Dr. Leanne M. Evans

Black women family childcare providers have withstood and adapted to numerous socioeconomic and political challenges and have remained a source of stability and connection within the Black community. This study is situated in the midst of the social disruption resulting from a pandemic that deeply impacted the landscape of early care and education. The purpose of this study was twofold: first, to describe the cultural knowledge of Black women early childhood educators as they reacted and organized to support young learners and their families in conditions of hardship, and second, to identify the types of capital with which the women engaged as they navigated their role in an essential profession.

To honor the voices of The Storytellers (i.e., Black women family childcare providers) and illuminate their unique perspectives, the author used methods rooted in my endarkened feminist narrative and Black feminist thought frameworks. The stories gathered through this sacred and rigorous work showed that the cultural knowledge of The Storytellers was rooted in (a) their spirituality and deep faith in God; (b) their boss mentality and willingness to act as autonomous agents within their businesses and communities; (c) their drive to educate and empower the next generation of women; and (d) an understanding that their roles as community mothers stretches far beyond the reach of their childcare businesses.

Endarkened feminist narrative is discussed as a qualitative research approach which marries the praxis of narrative inquiry with the sacred storytelling tradition and spiritual transmission that is foundational to Afrocentric cultural heritage. The practice of EFN, which recognizes research as a spiritual act, draws from Dillard's (2016) endarkened feminist epistemological (EFE) process of (re)membering, Yosso's (2005) description of cultural capital, and Tillman's (2002) description of culturally relevant research.

Implications are provided for state governing agencies and for the field of early childcare as a whole. First, on the state level, the author urges policymakers and legislators to reconceptualize how family childcare providers are assessed by policymakers, QRIS programs, and other regulatory agencies. In this, the author advocates for a more culturally responsive community-based rating system that champions the voices and values of parents, families, and other community-sanctioned vehicles for the definition of quality in early childhood education. Second, policymakers should examine the structures in place to support and protect those who care for our youngest citizens. Finally, for the field of early education, the author encourages a critical review of the way the cultural knowledge of Black women early childhood educators is represented in education reform and policy. Within the final reflections of this work, the author finds truths about her heritage that help her see herself more clearly as a Black woman early childhood educator.

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For my grandmother, Margaret V. Roberson,
My mother, Dr. Michele Turner,
And my daughter, Zoé E.A. Turner.
You are forever my sisters in faith, hope, and love.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FCP	Family Childcare Providers
BWECE	Black Woman Early Childhood Educator
ECE	Early Childhood Education
BFT	Black Feminist Thought
CRT	Critical Race Theory
CCWM	Community Cultural Wealth Model
EFN	Endarkened Feminist Narrative
EFE	Endarkened Feminist Epistemology
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019

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Black Women Family Childcare Providers' Role as Community Mothers During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Maggie kissed her mother's cheek and watched her disappear down the stairs of their apartment building on the Southside of Chicago. Like many Black women in the 1930s, Mother had to leave her own children to do domestic work and care for middle-class white children in order to earn a meager family income.

When Mother had to work, it was Maggie's responsibility to make sure that her two younger brothers and little sister stayed safe throughout the day. One fall morning after Mother left for the day and the four children finished eating their breakfast, Maggie's youngest brother challenged his siblings to a game of hide-and-seek. They tagged Maggie as the seeker and scurried out of the kitchen before she even finished washing their plates in the oversized kitchen sink.

Maggie tiptoed around the two-bedroom flat to find her siblings in their usual hiding places, but eventually she gave up calling, "come out, come out wherever you are!" She grinned as she heard giggling and shuffling coming from the closet down the hall and rushed to swing open the door. However, when she yanked at the closet door, it did not budge. She tauntingly coaxed her brother to let go of the handle, but he insisted that he was not holding it. Maggie pulled at the impossible wooden door again and again as her siblings banged harder and more frantically on the other side. In the rush, Maggie remembered that Mother always told her to go to Mrs. Jones', who lived in the apartment next door, if there was ever an emergency.

When Mrs. Jones finally opened her door, Maggie struggled through her tears to explain the situation. She watched in horror as Mrs. Jones fought to force the closet door to open and free the crying children. It was not until the firemen came and broke the door from the hinges that Maggie was able to comfort her trembling brothers and sister.

As Maggie sat on the cold, metal bench in the police station lobby, she shuddered as she recalled the day's events. She would never forget the bewildered terror in her mother's face as she burst through the police station doors, then the relief as she spotted her babies waiting for her on the bench. Little Maggie melted into her mother's arms and desperately kissed her wet, salty cheek. She recalled this day fifty years later when she opened her own in-home childcare business. Maggie was determined to know that I, her first granddaughter, would have a safe place to stay while my mother was away at work.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The vignette of Maggie, Margaret Velma Roberson (1938-2010), illustrates the reality of thousands of Black women domestic workers in the late 19th through mid-20th century. Mothers, desperate in their search for child care, often had to bring their children to work or leave them

with relatives, neighbors, or friends. Still others, like my great-grandmother, had to leave their children in the care of older siblings without adult supervision since the available nurseries were overcrowded or unwelcoming to Black families (Cahan, 1989; Griffin, 1906). Many Black women depended on friends, family, and neighbors to care for their infants and young children while they worked. Some even trained in churches and secret orders to become clubwomen, a sisterhood of businesswomen, politicians, community leaders, and activists dedicated to strengthening the impoverished Black community. The clubwomen collaborated to found orphanages, old folks' homes, day nurseries, and other institutions from which Black people were commonly segregated (Cahan, 1989; Kumfer, 1995; Lerner, 1974).

In the Black community, many care providers and teachers were seen as extended family members who went above and beyond their role as caregivers and educators (Dougherty, 2004; Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Milner & Howard, 2004; Royal & Gibson, 2017). They were dedicated to the education of Black children because they understood education was the liberation of the Black people (Anderson, 1988; hooks, 1994). Dougherty (2004) explained, “The genuine [Black] teacher knows that his duty is not abounded by the four walls of the classroom. He is [...] dealing with something more—with social conditions” (p.13). Black educators’ and care providers’ fervent commitment to the advancement of the Black community remains a cornerstone of present-day early childhood care and education.

While there is little record of the curricula and pedagogical choices of Black early childhood educators (BWECEs) of that time (Cunningham & Osborn, 1979), there is substantive research that illustrates how Black women care providers, educators, friends, family, and neighbors have fought to educate, care for, and sustain the Black community throughout times of economic and social hardship. They used their cultural knowledge to build networks of support

and position themselves on the front lines of social activism for their children and community (Dougherty, 2004; Roberts, 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Tuominen, 2003).

Social, political, economic, and global factors have significant impact on individual families and communities. Subsequently, these factors influence the educators and care providers who serve these communities. Over seven decades of state- and nationwide challenges have passed since Maggie's early years. During this time, Black family childcare providers have withstood and adapted to numerous socioeconomic and political challenges and remained a source of stability and connection within the Black community. This current study is situated in the midst of an unanticipated social disruption that erupted during the pandemic and deeply impacted the landscape of early care and education.

Study Background

In March of 2020, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) announced a highly contagious respiratory disease was spreading from person to person at alarming rates. The disease was called "coronavirus disease 2019" (abbreviated "COVID-19") and created a nationwide public health crisis. While the virus ravaged the world's social, economic, and public health structures, within the United States, Black men and women suffered higher contraction rates and mortality rates of COVID-19 than any other racial/ethnic population (Carpenter, 2020; Williams, 2020). The conditions of the Black community within this study's local context were especially alarming due to the disproportionate rate at which Black community members were dying from the virus. Some even called it "a crisis within a crisis" (Hess, 2020).

To protect the citizens and prevent the spread of COVID-19, the nation's state and local governments implemented "Safer at Home" orders which required all non-essential businesses to close and all non-essential workers to stay home. Those who had to leave their homes were

instructed to practice “social distancing” to prevent exposure to the disease. Social distancing mandates ordered that individuals who left their homes maintain at least 6-feet of space between themselves and other people (Social Distancing, Quarantine, and Isolation, 2020). Although people in all income groups left home less than they did before the crisis, in nearly every state, wealthier people were able to stay home the most—especially during the workweek (Valentino-DeVries, et al., 2020).

The essential workers of the COVID-19 era—the laborers deemed necessary for basic societal functioning—included individuals working in health care, law enforcement, transportation, communication, construction, and critical manufacturing. Black and Latin@ laborers were most likely to be part of the COVID-19 “essential” workforce occupying lower-paying, consumer-facing service jobs such as stores, warehouses, and essential businesses (Ray, 2020). Further, the nature of the consumer-facing work offered limited opportunity for employees to work from home (Murphy 2020). Consequently, workers from low-income Communities of Color and their families did not have the same privilege of staying “safer at home,” and the Black community was disproportionately affected by contractions and mortalities caused by exposure to the virus (Graham & Brooks, 2020; Ray, 2020; Valentino-DeVries, et al., 2020). These conditions were illuminated by Dr. Ashwin Vasani, a public health professor at Columbia University, when he said, “People want to talk about this virus as an equal opportunity pathogen, but it’s really not. It’s going right to the fissures in our society” (Valentino-DeVries, et al., 2020, n.p.).

Black women family childcare providers (FCPs) and BWECEs have consistently served the populations who live and work within the “fissures in our society.” They often serve low-income Families of Color (Tuominen, 2003), who happened to be among the most

affected by conditions of the pandemic (Graham & Brooks, 2020; Ray, 2020; Valentino-DeVries, et al., 2020). While childcare providers and early childhood educators were given a choice, they were asked to remain open because they provide a “critical service in allowing essential workers to keep our communities safe and healthy” (Department of Children and Families, personal communication, March 23, 2020). The Black women family childcare providers (FCPs) of this study served at the intersection of racial and socio-economic disparities exasperated by a nationwide public health crisis. These conditions created significant community hardship. Using Black feminist thought (BFT), drawn from critical race theory (CRT), I share the stories of the valiant women who supported the essential workforce through child care, even when it may have been more profitable to close and collect unemployment insurance.

Black women’s roles in maintaining societal function, their contributions to the field of early care and education, and their cultural knowledge has been consistently diminished and disregarded in research. Nonetheless, their influence lies at the heart of the Black community and the American social infrastructure. My work as a Black scholar is to reclaim the past, present, and future of Black women educators and care providers— speaking for those who came before, those who could not speak for themselves, and those whose voices were not heard (Amoah, 1997). As a Voice of Color, I take on the duty of illuminating the many ways racism and classism continue to deny Child Care Providers of Color equal membership and recognition in the nation’s essential workforce (Amoah, 1997).

This multiple case study explored how Black women early care and education professionals within regulated family childcare programs adapted their roles as care providers, small business owners, and community mothers during the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. I am especially interested in understanding how Black women family childcare providers used

their cultural knowledge to organize and support young Black children and their families. To this end, the research questions are as follows:

- How can the cultural knowledge of Black women family childcare providers be described as they reacted and organized to support young learners and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What types of capital did Black women family childcare providers engage as they navigated their roles as essential workers?

In completing this work, I not only emphasize and legitimize the epistemic perspective of Black women family childcare providers (FCPs), I am advancing the collective funds of societal knowledge through sharing the intellect and wisdom of those who have been historically and socially marginalized (Gilpin, 2006).

Definition of Terms

In recognition of the power of naming, the following list of terms and their definitions are given to contextualize their usage within this work.

- **COVID-19:** COVID-19 is an acronym that stands for coronavirus disease of 2019. COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. The virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes. In most people who contract the disease, it causes mild to moderate respiratory illness which is often cured without treatment. However, elderly people, those with cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness or death as result of contracting the virus (Cornavirus, n.d).

- **Family Childcare Provider (FCP):** Family childcare providers are licensed or certified child caregivers. Many providers care for non-relative children in their own homes rather than in a separate facility such as a childcare center. Family childcare is distinguished from center-based care both in terms of the number of children typically cared for and their relationship to the provider. Family childcare typically involves four-eight children (depending on the children’s age range), and often times some of the children in family childcare homes are related to the provider. Family childcare is also characterized by the fact that most providers operate alone, without paid assistance (Lent, 2016).
- **Essential Worker:** The term generally, applies to workers in law enforcement and public safety. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the list was extended to include food and agriculture workers, private and public health care workers, workers supporting the energy sector, waste and water waste workers, transportation and logistics workers, communications and information technology workers, community and government workers, those who work with hazardous materials, financial services, essential workers for defense industrial bases, and emergency personnel among others (Waterfield, 2020). In essence, the essential workforce consists of the laborers needed to maintain basic societal functioning.
- **Black or Black American:** These terms represent the generations of people whose African ancestors were uprooted in forced immigration to the Americas. “Black” acknowledges the unique identity of generations of African descendants who only know America as home. Black people or Black Americans are the propagators of Black culture that, while rooted in our Afro-heritage, has developed into a unique cultural epistemology. I capitalize “Black” in elevation of the voices and existence of an historically marginalized group. I simultaneously

deemphasize whiteness in resistance to white hegemony that works to silence and oppress Black people and the expression of Blackness (Collins, 2002; Davis, 2018).

- **Black Women Early Childhood Educator (BWECE):** This term is used to embody the millions of women across America who are committed to the profession of caring for and educating children. BWECEs include Black women within group programs, public and private preschools, and family childcare programs who contribute to the economic and cultural survival of the Black community through their role as caregivers, educators, and othermothers.
- **Cultural Knowledge:** My definition of cultural knowledge is inspired by Collins' (1989) explanation that "Blacks share a common experience of oppression [which] has fostered shared Afrocentric value that permeates the family structure, religious institution, cultures, and community life of blacks [...]. This Afrocentric consciousness penetrated the shared history of people of African descent through the framework of a distinctive Afrocentric epistemology" (p.755). I believe this distinctive epistemology, or consciousness, is the heart of the cultural knowledge that resonates within the souls of Black folks, guides our everyday interactions, and helps us thrive despite unjust and inequitable social conditions.
- **Childcare:** In my study, I distinguish between "childcare" and "child care." Childcare is the institutionalized care of children that, within American society, is governed by white hegemonic values and norms. Within the childcare institution, Black care providers and educators operate under systemic rules and regulations embedded within an overarching canon that may or may not reflect their own ways of being, caring, or educating a child. However, these rules are followed to ensure child safety, protect against possible liability, maintain licensure status, and meet externally defined standards of quality.

- **Child Care:** This term describes what women have done since the beginning of time in nurturing, guiding, and raising the next generation(s). Child care can happen within an institutionalized setting, however it is most readily seen in informal settings such as the home and the community at large. This is the natural form of child nurturing and rearing that is rooted in the caregiver's cultural ways of being.
- **People of Color or Communities of Color:** These terms include any person living in America who is not considered white. This includes: Blacks, Latin@s, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Indigenous populations, and individuals of mixed heritage. The term emphasizes common experiences of systemic racism, and I intentionally capitalize it in opposition to white supremacy that has marginalized these groups historically and presently.

In my study of how Black women family childcare providers reacted and organized to support their communities in times of hardship, I first explored existing literature for an understanding of the roots of BWECes' cultural knowledge and the early childhood context from a Black feminist perspective. In the following chapter, I will provide a review of the literature discussing how generations of Black women care providers and educators have acted as othermothers, advocates, and activists for Black children and their communities. I will then provide a Black feminist perspective of the early childhood context, critiquing the racism and classism still prevalent in early childhood care and education. My aim is to portray the unique struggles and the powerful roles that Black women early childhood educators (BWECes) play in defining and enriching our culture. The FCPs of this case study represent the voices of BWECes within family childcare programs. Therefore, I use the FCPs' individual voices to better understand the collective voice of BWECes, which cannot exist without the individual. I acknowledge that as a Black woman educator and scholar, the validation and representation of

their experiences are a part of my own self-empowerment and the amplification of my own voice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Historically, Black women, as care providers, educators, activists, and othermothers, have taken a stand within their homes, communities, and the nation's classrooms to ensure the survival and empowerment of the Black community on every front (Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Milner, 2006; Milner, 2007; Roberts, 2010; Walker, 2000; Tuominen, 2003). During the COVID-19 pandemic, community care providers and early educators again organized to position themselves as supports for Black community workers and the national economy. Through the lens of Black feminist thought and critical race theory, this literature review delineates a historical and socio-political exploration of how Black women educators and family childcare providers (FCPs) consistently react and reorganize to help the Black community navigate various systems of oppression and social stressors.

About one quarter of American children under the age of six in childcare attend a home-based family childcare program (Gerstenblatt, et al., 2014). Family childcare providers are divided into two groups: certified and licensed providers. Certified FCPs can care for up to four children; while licensed FCPs can care for up to eight children at a time (Lent, 2016). There are an estimated 231,705 licensed family childcare homes within the United States, which employ over 650,000 family care providers (Gerstenblatt, et al., 2014). More than one-third of low-income children in non-relative care attend a family childcare program. Within the current city of study, there are 521 licensed family childcare providers (Licensed Child Care Directories, n.d.). Within these environments, childcare and education providers offer an intimate, home-like setting with smaller groups of children (Brown, 2009). Moreover, FCPs' flexible hours and more

affordable enrollment fees often appeal to low-income families or parents employed in shift work (Tovar, et al., 2017).

Family childcare providers often have less formal education and fewer professional development and mentorship opportunities than their counterparts employed in center-based childcare programs (Fuligni, et al., 2009; Tovar, et al., 2017). Moreover, their work conditions include lack of separation between work and home, juggling multiple roles (including caregiver, business manager, and parent adviser) with few or no colleagues to help with the workload (Gerstenblatt, et al., 2014). Yet, despite the complexity of their work, FCPs are often stigmatized as non-professional or deemed babysitters (Fuligni, et al., 2009; Gerstenblatt, et al., 2014; Tuominen, 2003).

In spite of the stigma of the profession, Black women early childhood educators (BWECEs) within the home setting and center-based programs work to prepare Children of Color for future socio-emotional and academic success. BWECEs carry the weight of their Blackness and their gendered identities within a society that preferences whiteness and masculinity (Collins, 2002; Crenshaw, 1991; Taylor, 1988). Additionally, family childcare providers shoulder the economic challenge of being small business owners, which includes maintaining liability and health insurance, maintaining state licensure regulations, and meeting overhead costs (Gerstenblatt, et al., 2014).

Within this examination of the experiences and perspectives of FCPs, I seek a deeper understanding of how the identities of being Black, a woman of lower socioeconomic status, and an early educator intersect to inform the cultural knowledge of BWECEs. Furthermore, I want to know how this cultural knowledge aids them in fulfilling their roles as community mothers and care providers within the context of the pandemic. With this intention, I have examined the

literature to explore the roots of Black women’s cultural knowledge, which includes the history of Black women family childcare providers and early educators, Black womanhood in America, and Black women in early education. I also looked closely at the early childhood context from a Black feminist perspective revealing the prevalence of deficit perspectives and differential knowledge, the universalization of childcare, and the professionalization of family childcare.

Black Women’s Cultural Knowledge

The construction of Black women’s cultural knowledge is rooted in our shared history of struggle and creative resistance to oppression (Collins, 1989; Davis, 2018; Dillard, 2000; Majors, 2004). As “mothers, othermothers, teachers, and churchwomen in essentially all black rural communities in urban neighborhoods, U.S. black women participate in constructing and reconstructing [their] oppositional knowledges” (Collins, 2002, p.13). As a part of our deep culture, our funds of knowledge are “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll, et al., 1992, p. 133). It has been long understood within the Black community that Black matriarchs are the keepers of cultural tradition, and it is our responsibility to extend this knowledge to the next generations whether in the home or in the classroom (Bernard & Bernard, 1998; Collins, 2016).

The History of Black Women Family Care Providers and Early Educators

The story of Black early childcare and education— like the story of the Black American woman— is long, complex, and laden with adverse conditions and discriminatory policies. Family child care (or family, friend, and neighbor care) is one of the oldest professions and is still the most widely used form of child care today (Lent, 2016). Yet, while Black educators and care providers made significant contributions to the field of early care and education, the

documentation of their experiences have received little attention (Cunningham & Osborn, 1979). Historical accounts of Black women working as family childcare providers within the home setting are even more scarce (Lent, 2016).

Historical documentation of Black women care providers begin in early colonial America. The first Blacks to settle in America were not slaves, but indentured servants (Berry & Gross, 2020; Cunningham & Osborn, 1979). In 1620, the Virginia Colony founded the first public school of “Negros and Indians.” Young Black children attended these schools until about 1640 when enslaved African people in America became more commonplace, and thus, the status of Black people changed (Cunningham & Osborn, 1979).

The education of young Black children shifted drastically in the context of institutional slavery. Some education historians suggest that slaves, servants, and nanny figures represent the earliest forms of family child care (Auerbach & Woodill, 1992). However, these arrangements likely took place in the child’s home, were not through a negotiated relationship, and were not compensated. Child care for Black children at this point in Black women’s history in America was communal care. As screaming children were kidnapped from their African homes, ripped from their families, and loaded onto slave ships, older Black girls and women filled the role of comforters and guardians for the young orphans (Berry & Gross, 2020). On the plantations, the whole enslaved community, especially the women, aided in rearing the enslaved children. Because enslaved mothers were expected to promptly return to work after childbirth (King, 1994), the care of babies and young children became the primary responsibility of the very old—those who were no longer good for manual labor (Collins, 2016b; Gaspar & Clark, 1996).

In these conditions, communal child care substituted for individualized maternal care, and Black women, as a group, accepted the onus of raising one another’s children (Collins,

2016b). Even after institutionalized slavery ended, the reliance on kin and extended family members for material and emotional support are survival strategies that have continued in the Black community (Brewster & Padavic, 2002; Collins, 2002, 2016). The foundational understanding that community is survival is evident in the way grandmothers, siblings, aunts, care providers and even teachers become othermothers—women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities—for the children in their care (Collins, 2002, 2016).

Education was haphazard in the United States before the 1860s since most states had no compulsory education laws. The few laws that existed were rarely enforced and only applied to white children. However, despite the conditions of the time, there were three types of educational facilities developed for the early education of young Black children before 1860: formal schools, sabbath schools, and clandestine schools (Cunningham & Osborn, 1979).

One of the first examples of formal school education for Black children occurred in 1750. Reverend Thomas Bacon, a formerly enslaved person, founded an integrated formal school for poor children. Throughout the next century, a number of public primary schools were created for Black children in Massachusetts and Virginia. Although these schools existed, they were too under-resourced to meet the needs of the enslaved Black community (Cunningham & Osborn, 1979). Perhaps the best example of formal in-home care and education in these times were dame schools, which offered education programs equivalent to today's ECE programs. In these schools, a local woman would serve as both a babysitter and educator to several children at a time. The woman would teach basic literacy and mathematical skills while managing her domestic duties (Lent, 2016).

These programs most often prepared white males with the basic skills needed to enroll in a town school, while female students were taught skills such as sewing and knitting (Auerbach &

Woodhill, 1992; Lent, 2016; Michel, 1999). However, Quaker and Moravian communities believed in educating both genders and promoted the education of African Americans. In some instances, Black children were given access to the formal schooling of dame schools. Yet, like the formal schools, there was little funding for supporting Black children's education (Auerbach & Woodhill, 1992; Cunningham & Osborn, 1979; Lent, 2016; Michel, 1999).

The second early institution for Black education were Sabbath schools, established at the turn of the 19th century. They provided religious instruction for many of the enslaved people and even trained in literacy skills. This type of schooling was allowed in the South until the early 1800s, when some small groups of enslaved people began rebelling against their owners. Education was seen as the root of revolution, so fearful plantation owners pushed for legislation to enact laws that prohibited both formal and Sabbath schools (Cunningham & Osborn, 1979).

The prohibition of formal and Sabbath schools led to the last type of early education for young Black children—the clandestine or midnight schools. In these schools, Black women who had previously learned to read began teaching children and other determined enslaved people literacy skills. Because of the clandestine nature of this stage of Black education, little is known about the women and children who risked harsh punishment and mutilation for the opportunity to teach and learn (Cunningham & Osborn, 1979).

Post-Civil War Early Education. Following the Civil War, a number of schools for Black children were founded with the understanding that education is the liberation of the Black people (Anderson, 1988). A prime example of emancipatory early schooling for Black children is the work of Lucy Laney, a formerly enslaved woman. Laney, a graduate of the Hampton School's first class, founded a nursery and day school for Black children in Augusta, Georgia in 1883. When she started, Laney's goal was to support the working mothers of the community.

However, her program grew into the nationally recognized Haines Institute, a full-on educational institution for the advancement of Black children (Cunningham & Osborn, 1979).

The post-Civil War early education movement continued in segregated tracks for Black and white children. The racial tension and discrimination of the era inspired Black women to organize in churches and secret societies and create the early care and education opportunities their communities needed (Cahan, 1989; Collins, 2016b; Cunningham & Osborn, 1979). In 1896, the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), under the leadership of its president Mary Church Terrel, established a Black kindergarten. Terrel was an avid supporter of early childhood education. She and Haydee Campbell, a graduate of Oberlin College and the leader of their kindergarten program, founded a whole network of Black kindergartens beginning in the St. Louis school system and expanding across the United States and even Canada (Cunningham & Osborn, 1979).

Black women continued to train as teachers and early educators in the Hampton School and the Tuskegee Institute. Coursework included the care and feeding of infants and general childrearing information. Howard University and Atlanta University also adapted early childhood coursework. In 1902, Howard University awarded 13 diplomas to Black women in kindergarten education. They even offered advanced coursework to prepare women for work as early childcare program directors (Cunningham & Osborn, 1979).

Urbanization and Black Women's Clubs: "Lifting as We Climb." The growing need for Black child care and discriminatory government funding, during the Progressive Era (1896-1906), prompted Black clubwomen to establish their own facilities to keep Black money within the Black community (Cahan, 1989; Gatewood, 1990/2000; Lerner, 1974). The clubwomen were members of the Black elite consisting of businesswomen, politicians, ministers, and community

leaders. They argued that "If we must be segregated, we want to segregate ourselves; we do not want to be 'Jim Crowed' by white people and then pay them for doing it" (Knupfer, 1995, p. 1912). Therefore, the clubwomen used white racism and segregation as an impetus for founding the much-needed institutions from which Blacks were excluded. While the clubwomen engaged in various social pastimes— such as tournaments, masquerades, balls, and high teas— most stayed dedicated to the NACW's motto, "lifting as we climb." Even with the blatant class differentiation between them and their beneficiaries, Black clubwomen maintained racial solidarity and commitment to advancing the Black community (Gaines, 2012; Knupfer, 1995).

Uplifting the Black community meant that educated Black people would take the responsibility of improving the quality of life for millions of formerly enslaved people by improving their "morals," educating them, and providing an array of social services (Gaines, 2012). Educated Blacks saw themselves as leaders and role models for the community. On one hand, they were socio-economically distanced from the impoverished Black community, yet they were compelled to associate with the uneducated, impoverished Black people to address their ignorance, poverty, and perceived immorality (DuBois, 1903; Gaines, 2012; Giddings, 1984; Logan, 1965/1997). Towards this purpose, Black women's clubs collaborated not only with one another, but with local chapters of the National Urban League and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (Knupfer, 1995).

Interrelated to the history of Black Americans during the Progressive Era was the immigration of millions of southeastern Europeans to the United States' northern urban centers. The immigrants arrived very poor and with limited English or labor skills. They experienced significant ethnic discrimination and were, at one point, deemed unfit for integration into America polity, society, and bloodline (Park & Kemp, 2006). White advocates for immigrant

rights founded the Hull House and the Chicago Immigrants' Protective League (1907) to facilitate the immigrants' transition into American society. They advocated for philanthropic efforts toward the education and acculturation of the poor European immigrants who were deemed racially inferior to the "old immigrants" of northern and western Europe (Park & Kemp, 2006).

Contrastingly, Black Americans were disregarded and excluded from the support of white philanthropists. Instead, it was Black clubwomen who continued to prioritize the advancement of working-class Black women and children. The clubwomen's efforts to address the needs of the impoverished Black community were primarily funded by Black philanthropists with little aid from other organizations or the U.S. government (Gatewood, 1990/2000). Although the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Black colleges, white missionaries, and settlement houses established kindergartens and early childhood programs, with the exception of Black colleges, these organizations focused on the needs of impoverished immigrant children and did not necessarily address the unique needs of Black children (Gatewood, 1990/2000). Over time, the discrimination of European immigrants lessened as the privileges of whiteness settled in—allowing the immigrants to assimilate into the American social-economic infrastructure (Carter, 2018; Collins, 2002; Park & Kemp, 2006; Suransky & Polakow, 1982). However, as this transformation occurred for the European immigrants, discrimination and exclusion persisted for the Black community. As such, Black clubwomen, activists, educators, and mothers continued to fight for equitable education access and quality child care options.

Through the resolve of Black clubwomen, the first Black day nursery was founded in Harlem, New York in 1902 to meet the child care needs of working Black mothers. Hope Day Nursery became the only Black institution of its kind. It provided childcare for Black mothers for

a fee of five cents a day, while receiving no government support. Instead, the school was supplemented by contributions from board members, friends, and other civic-minded citizens in the community (Cahan, 1989; Griffin, 1906). Later, in a parallel movement with its white counterparts, Hope Day Nursery expanded their services to address children's educational, developmental, socialization, and health needs. Hope Day Nursery was an early model of educational programming that resembled the work of modern-day early care and education programs for the Black community (Cahan, 1989).

While the Black community continued to make advancements in the establishment of day nurseries and kindergartens, there remained a preference for informal care child arrangements (Lent, 2016; Michel, 1999). Many mothers relied on informal child care within the home setting provided by family members, friends, or neighbors due to a sense of community, convenience of location, and flexibility in scheduling. Moreover, Black mothers and certain other groups of mothers preferred not to undergo the “invasive and intimidating application process and investigation that had become routine at charitable institutions,” which discriminated against Black women and unmarried mothers (Michel, 1999, p.46).

Throughout 1916-1970, there was a large urbanization process, called the Great Black Migration. As Jim Crow laws spread, employers hired immigrants for jobs that had formerly been performed by Black laborers. Subsequently, Black women and their families left agricultural work in Southern rural communities to take up domestic and industrial work in northern cities such as Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, and Milwaukee (Collins, 2002; Dougherty, 2004; Haskins, 1998; Kendi, 2019). The growing industrial economy in World War I-era America contributed to a wealth of job opportunities and better pay for Black people. Black women and their families sought to escape the discrimination,

segregation, and Jim Crow laws prevalent in the South. As Black men—who competed with white immigrant men for jobs in the urban labor markets—were subject to frequent layoffs, Black women fulfilled the growing demand for low paying domestic work (Collins, 2016b; Giddings, 1984). Like my great-grandmother who moved from Mississippi to Chicago in the early 1920s, Black girls transitioning to adolescence often trained in domestic work in the South while caring for younger siblings. When finished training, they would migrate to Northern cities to help relatives with their children until they could secure a domestic job to contribute to the family wage (Clark-Lewis, 1985).

While Black women and girls were constantly subjected to sexual abuse and highly exploitative conditions in their domestic work, there were few choices of Black women's labor at the time, so they persisted as a way to maintain their family's income and survival (Collins, 2002; Taylor, 1998). As millions of Black families continued to migrate, the “ghettos” of Northern cities swelled. Black communities were crippled with the effects of poverty such as dilapidated housing, prostitution, truancy, and unsanitary living conditions (Farmer-Hinton, 2002; Knupfer, 1995). Unlike the European immigrants, the Black migrants did not have the assistance of the settlement house movement to help them transition into the Northern cities. As such, migrant Black families faced immense challenges in adjusting from a rural environment to the racially segregated housing industry in urban centers (Dougherty, 2004; Farmer-Hinton, 2002; Knupfer, 1995). Nonetheless, Black women anchored themselves in the hope that a fresh start in northern cities would offer their children educational opportunity and their piece of the American dream (Anderson, 1988; Dougherty, 2004; Haskins, 1998).

Like my great-grandmother, many of the Black mothers depended on kin, neighbors, and other types of communal networks to care for their young children while they worked away from

the home. The urban childcare programs were not prepared to handle the influx of Black migrant children. Moreover, Black children and families were highly discriminated against (Cahan, 1989; Griffin, 1906; Johnson- Straub, 2007; Suransky & Polakow, 2008). Black mothers seeking to admit their babies and young children into day nurseries “found that they were either too crowded or opposed to accommodating Negroes” (Griffin, 1906, p. 397). According to Frankel (1994), the first documented family childcare program was established in Philadelphia in 1928 because their day nursery was unable to handle the high demand for child care and the varied schedules of the working parents.

Civil Rights. Clubwomen and other Black women activists were highly influential in the women’s suffrage movement in the years 1890 through 1920 (Collins, 2002; Taylor, 1998). Black women organized in suffrage clubs and voters’ leagues and rallied for the right to vote in heat of Jim Crow oppression and the theater of violence that surrounded public lynchings (Taylor, 1998). In 1910, Ida B. Wells-Barnett wrote, “The Negro has been given separate and inferior schools, because he has no ballot” (Wells-Barnett, 1990, p. 269). From the beginning, Black women activists knew it took political enfranchisement to improve their children’s schools and the conditions of Black wage laborers (Taylor, 1998).

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, there was continued disparity between state expenditures for white and Black schools. In 1927, Dorothy Howard established the first Black nursery school in the United States. Later in 1930, Spelman College founded a laboratory nursery school. Under the leadership of Pearlie Reed, this school became the training grounds for various Black women early childhood education leaders. Among these legacies are Flemma Kittrell, the first Black women to receive a Doctorate in early childhood education; Dorothy Neal, who helped establish the early Head Start centers; and Ida Jones Curry, who left teaching

at the Spelman Institute to become the director of early childhood education at the Hampton Institute (Cunningham & Osborn, 1979).

During the Great Depression (1929-1941), the U.S. government created and funded numerous childcare programs to provide jobs for care providers. However, the New Deal was designed specifically to prevent Black workers from obtaining the economic and social benefits of the legislation. For example, in 1935, the Aid for Dependent Children (ADC) was established by the Social Security Act (1935) to assist fatherless families (Blank & Blum, 1997). However, the ADC was highly discriminatory against Black women applying for the program's assistance. Instead of receiving assistance, Black mothers were directed to employment offices where they were pushed into menial, low-wage jobs (Reese, 2005). Similarly, the Fair Labor Standards Act (1938), specifically excluded agricultural and "domestic workers" to target Black laborers. Since paid child care was typically provided in the home, Black women FCPs and domestic workers were denied the right to organize and did not receive the same protection as other workers through the law (Johnson-Staub, 2017). Nonetheless, Black mothers, activists, educators, and care providers continued pushing for equitable educational access for Black children.

The Black Panther Party. During the 1940s, individual states began to issue family childcare licenses separate from the licenses issued to center-based programs and foster homes—thus, family childcare programs became a regulated profession (Lent, 2016). This shift to regulated in-home child care took place in the shadow of a series of court cases won by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) which laid the groundwork for the desegregation of the nation's public schools. In the fall of 1952, the United States presented the Supreme Court with five desegregation cases combined under the title, *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka (1954)*.

Ultimately, the Supreme Court unanimously agreed that “To separate [colored children] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone” (Kendi, 2019, p.176). Yet, recognition of the effects of separating children by race within public schools did not initiate immediate change in discriminatory policies and practices that kept Black children in de facto segregated schools and early childhood programs (Dougherty, 2004; Frankenberg, 2016).

There remained significant educational inequities for Children of Color. The majority of Black students still attended predominantly “minority” schools,” and young Black children remained in segregated early childhood programs (Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010; Frankenberg, 2016; Milner, 2013). Racialized neighborhood attendance policies, intact busing, discriminatory transfer policies, and a racially segregated housing industry kept Blacks in isolated communities and persistently hampered their educational access (Bonds, et al., 2009; Dougherty, 2004; Farmer-Hinton, 2002; Kendi, 2019).

Seeing Black families still segregated in overcrowded, blighted inner cities with high rates of unemployment and poverty galvanized the formation of the Black Panther Party (BPP). In 1966, the Black Panther Party was founded in Oakland, California by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale to challenge police brutality and claim social-political, economic, and educational opportunities for Black Americans. Oftentimes, descriptions of the Black Panther Party (BPP) invoke images of militant Black men in leather jackets. However, few recognize that the movements’ membership consisted of over 60 percent women, according to a survey taken by Bobby Seale in 1969 (Farmer, et al., 2013; Taylor, 1989). These women were integral to every aspect of BPP life, including serving as prominent leaders. The BPP’s Ten Point Program

outlined a vision for Black liberation, encompassing demands for jobs, housing, education, and self-determination (West, 2010).

The revolutionary politics of the BPP linked the conditions of local Black communities to the economic inequality perpetuated by American capitalism and neocolonialism (West, 2010). Moreover, the BPP recognized the public-school system's failure to educate Black and impoverished youth as the source of generational oppression and socio-economic disenfranchisement (West, 2010). In response, the Black Panther Party established the Youth Institute in 1971 to break the cycle of racist and classist oppression in the Black community. The goal was to "provide an example in the education of Black children and to guide our children toward becoming fully capable of analyzing the problems they will face and to develop creative solutions to deal with them" (West, 2010, p. 5).

In addition to strong beliefs about the inequitable state of the public school system, Black Panther women (Pantherettes) advocated for issues of childcare and early education. Pantherettes identified traditional ideas about childcare and parenting as manifestations of "bourgeois gender roles" and the same capitalist structures they were fighting against in other arenas of the organization (Farmer, et al., 2013, n.p.). Accordingly, they began experimenting with communal housing and child care. Within the communal living situations of most Panthers, they employed alternative models of parenting outside of the nuclear family. All community members were expected to cook, clean, and raise the children, both their own and of others. There were accounts of numerous in-home daycares, most often headed by Pantherettes, where they cared for and worked toward the development of the community's children (Farmer, et al., 2013, n.p.).

Within the BPP early childhood programs and preschools, educators recognized the lack of research on "preschool age" and younger Black children's development. Furthermore, because

of American racism and resistance of communalism, there were no resources provided to study the development of children in a communal lifestyle (West, 2010). In response, the BPP developed their own two-tiered comprehensive child development program, which included infant stimulation (for children from birth until one year) and sensorimotor development (for children one until two and a half years) (West, 2010). Within the infant stimulation program, BPP early educators established their own developmental schedule to give educators “an accurate evaluation of the child to use as a guide to cultivate the child's developmental needs” (West, 2010, p. 56). The developmental schedule included: motor skills (gross and fine), adaptive (problem solving), verbalization, self-awareness, and responsiveness (West, 2010)—all domains of widely adopted state learning standards today.

The Black Panther childcare system, fueled by Pantherettes and even some Panther men, is a chapter in the history of Black child care that is often overlooked. Outside of the provisions made for young Black children through the BPP, it was not until Title IV of the Civil Rights Act (1964) was passed that Blacks and other People of Color gained legal access to equitable group childcare and other institutions receiving federal financial assistance.

Welfare and the Rise of Black Childcare Programs. The value of communal child care within the Black community is evident in the Black Panther organization as well as the use of community and kin networks to care for Black children. Throughout the long history of social, physical, and economic isolation, Black women have relied on community and kin for material and emotional support (Brewster & Padavic, 2002; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). However, this core value was threatened by a rise in the number of Black women entering the labor force— from about 43% in 1970 to 64% at the end of the twentieth century (Brewster & Padavic, 2002).

During the 1960s and 1970s, whites became increasingly resentful after a series of racist media stories sensationalized the idea of hundreds of thousands of unmarried, Black welfare mothers out to cheat the system at the taxpayers' expense (Resse, 2005). Lewis' (1966) publication of *The Culture of Poverty* argued that the Black family tended towards female authoritarian households because Black women refused to marry, and Black men were too immature to lead a home. Similarly, Moynihan (1965) wrote that the Black female-headed family structure was highly problematic. He argued that the disintegration of the Black family and high rates of "illegitimate" children led to "startling increases in welfare dependency" (Moynihan, 1965, p. 12).

In response to the white public outcry, in 1981, President Ronald Reagan substantially cut welfare payments, changed eligibility requirements, and encouraged states to develop workfare programs. As a result, almost five hundred thousand families lost their welfare benefits, predominately in Communities of Color (Reese, 2005). This was the first in a chain of welfare reforms that targeted low-income Families of Color. The Family Support Act of 1988 established the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program, which had states expand education and training for applicants rather than become welfare recipients (Reese, 2005). Similarly, in 1992 the Clinton administration promised to "end welfare as we know it" through tougher work requirements and two-year consecutive time limits. Clinton's Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, which mandated individuals must work outside of the home in order to receive public assistance, dramatically increased the demand for quality center-based childcare in the Black community, while simultaneously decreasing the availability of grandmothers and aunts who had earlier aided in kin care and in-home child care networks

(Brewster & Padavic, 2002; Lifton, 2001; Padavic & Reskin 2002; Presser, 1989; Spain & Bianchi, 1996; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1982).

By 2004, nearly 72% of women between the ages of 25 and 54 were in the labor force—many of whom were mothers of young children (Blank, 2010). Black women entrepreneurs and businesswomen, again, rose to the occasion by filling the communities' need for institutional support and childcare facilities. The number of incorporated childcare centers and unregistered family day cares doubled between 1977 and 1992 (Brewster & Padavic, 2002; Casper & O'Connell, 1998). In this study's local context, the number of state-licensed family providers in the state increased, from one 196 in March 1996 to 713 by August 2001 (Pawasarat & Quinn, 2002). As of July 2018, there were 338 family childcare providers in the study's local county (Department of Children and Families, n.d.). Among the new family childcare program was, Kiddie Lane Family Child Care, my grandmother's program which she founded in her home in 1989.

Black Womanhood in America

As illustrated in the complex story of Black women in child care, Black women have employed various resistance and navigational strategies to overcome relentless gendered, socio-economic, and racial oppression in America. These collective experiences have had a significant impact on our cultural knowledge and epistemic perspective. Black women, as beacons of strength and persistence within our community, have taken a stand within their homes, the community streets, and the nation's classrooms to ensure the survival and empowerment of the Black people on every front. In my journey to a better understanding of how the formation and intersections of Black women's roles and identities (i.e., Blackness, womanhood, socioeconomic

status, and early educator) inform the cultural knowledge of BWECEs, I explored the nature of identities.

A woman's social identity is a fluid aspect of her essence. One's identity is a reflection of both internal and external assumptions, roles, and behaviors that often fluctuate within different social and physical spaces. Hall (1990) states:

Cultural identity...is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. Cultural identities have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power...identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (p. 225)

Accordingly, while the Black woman's identity has been molded by experiences of our past, it is ever fluctuating as we continue to grow, learn, and adapt to life experiences. As racialized beings within America's social structure, our Blackness functions as a floating signifier (Hall, 1990) loaded with the implications of our social heritage of race, gender, and socioeconomic status.

The Weight of Blackness. I describe the essence of Black identity as the weight of Blackness. It is a multifaceted inheritance and epistemological standpoint that manifests in the daily lives of Black people. Our weight is a bittersweet amalgam of the pain and struggle of our heritage and the strength, faith, and perseverance that we have generated as a people. Our Blackness is an inescapable uniqueness that forms the life experiences of each Black person. When brought to light, this weight can be a driving force of empowerment, justice, and liberation. But when repressed, it becomes a brooding quagmire of bitterness, resentment, and disempowerment (DuBois, 1903).

Understanding the weight of Blackness, must be prefaced with an understanding of the construct of whiteness. Through the introduction of colonialism, imperialism, slavery, apartheid, and other systems that rely on racial domination, Black women were burdened with a Black identity that, in many cases, supersedes our human identity (Collins, 1989; Harris, 1993). Historically, with the construct of race-based slavery, the presumption of freedom was associated with whiteness. The Black color raised the presumption of slavery—a piece of property and less than a human. In these conditions, one’s “whiteness became a shield from slavery”—a privileged protection from the threat of commodification and other oppressions (Harris, 1993, p.1720).

White people have come to expect and rely on the benefits of their whiteness to the extent that if policy or regulation does not cater to their sense of values or norm, there is intense discomfort and fierce opposition (Gilpin, 2006; Kendi, 2019). Yet, with the perpetuation and normalization of whiteness, it has become invisible, similar to the way that fish do not realize their dependence on water until it is no longer there. According to Gilpin (2006), the epistemic privilege granted to white people and whiteness is so much so that their worldview and values have become the norm while the epistemologies of Black people, women, and other marginalized groups are constantly questioned and devaluated.

Collins (1989) asserts that,

Blacks share a common experience of oppression [which] has fostered shared Afrocentric value that permeates the family structure, religious institution, cultures, and community life of blacks [...]. This Afrocentric consciousness has penetrated the shared history of people of African descent through the framework of a distinctive Afrocentric epistemology. (p.755)

This distinctive epistemology, or consciousness, is the heart of the cultural knowledge that resonates within the souls of Black folks and enables us to understand and withstand the world. While the shared experience of oppression has cultivated Black women's rich cultural identity, experiential wisdom, and resilience, it is accompanied by a surfeit of connotations, stereotypes, and assumptions rooted in racist notions of "otherness" (Collins, 1989, 2002; Davis, 2018; Kendi, 2019). Race-making and othering are essential elements for all racial ideas (Kendi, 2019) and are the key to rationalizing all race-based epistemologies. Racism devalues, disempowers and disenfranchises groups regarded as inferior (Kendi, 2019; Klein & Chen, 2001).

While Black women activists and educators once fought against the de jure racism of Jim Crow and other blatant social-political disenfranchisement, we now face a new "modern racism" that is more subtle but nonetheless powerful (Katz, 1989; Lynn & Dixson, 2013; Williams & Mohammed, 2013). The endemic nature of race has penetrated every domain of society and influences the common, everyday experiences of most Women of Color to the extent that it no longer pays to imagine the non-existence of race and racism in our world. At this point, doing so actually allows the ruling race and class to stay in power unquestioned and unchecked (Delgado & Stefancic, 2004, Kendi, 2019).

BWECEs and the low-income mothers they most often serve balance the responsibility of their families, professions, and personal lives. However, they are constantly bombarded with images of lazy Black mothers and low-quality Black childcare providers' exploitation the welfare system (Reese, 2005). Operating in a noxious social environment where racialized images and negative cultural representations of Black womanhood and Blackness remain highly prevalent weighs on the Black woman's psyche. Race-related stress is often the product of the persistent barrage of racist experiences and the defamation of one's culture, worldview, or

cultural group (Szymanski & Lewis, 2015). It can also lead to internalized racism in which individuals of a stigmatized racial/ethnic group consciously or subconsciously assume the wider society's negative stereotypes about their group (Williams & Mohammed, 2013).

Within the American Black woman's psyche, there is an internal war against assuming the stigmas associated with Black culture, all while wanting to achieve a sense of belonging in a society that constantly reminds the Black women of their otherness. As Kendi (2019) wrote, "It is a racial crime to be yourself if you are not White in America. It is a racial crime to look like yourself or empower yourself if you are not White" (p. 38). Consequently, the way Black women see the world is often through the eyes of whiteness. W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) called this sentiment, a "double consciousness",

This sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p.3)

This persistent psychological conflict can be debilitating to the expression of Black women's cultural identity. It can lead to individuals distancing themselves from or abandoning one identity for the perceived social benefits of the other. As a result, some Black women remain in a state of identity contradiction and codeswitching where they compartmentalize their lives, emphasizing, and/or deemphasizing different identities in different contexts (Mouzon & Mclean, 2017).

Individual, cultural, and institutional race-related stress (Utsey, 1999), social invisibility and misrepresentation, the double-consciousness (DuBois, 1903), and internalizing the negative images of one's own social group (Williams & Mohammed, 2013) are all factors that contribute

to the weight of Blackness. Its effects are deeply rooted in the cultural ways of being and the cultural knowledge of Black women. When not managed, it can be damaging to Black women's mental health patterns— increasing depressive symptoms and psychological distress (Mouzon & Mclean, 2017). However, it has also contributed to the psychological fortitude and communal resilience that allow us to not only navigate, but to overcome the symptoms of our unjust plight.

The Intersection of Gender. Working within a devalued, poorly compensated care profession puts women in a marginalized space within the American social fabric. However, occupying this space as a Black woman is exponentially challenging. The multifaceted implications of Black womanhood remain another significant matter in the exploration of Black women's cultural knowledge. The Black woman has a complex and paradoxical relationship to America. While we exist marginalized and ostracized within American history, we are simultaneously exploited to create and maintain white supremacy (Berry & Gross, 2020).

Hine (1996) argued that even the great W.E.B. DuBois underappreciated the obstacles confronting Black women in their struggle for equity. She states, “Had he considered the issue of gender, instead of writing ‘One ever feels his twoness’, he would have mused about how one ever feels her ‘fiveness’: Negro, American, woman, poor, black woman” (n.p.). These stigmatized identities and the subsequent oppressions are not hierarchical— they are intersectional and perpetuate widely shared American racist and sexist beliefs (Collins & Blige, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2018). Yet, the interlocking identities that affect the lives of BWECEs cultivate differences in our biographies and add dimensions to our experiential funds of knowledge (Collins, 1993; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991).

Because of our unique positionality in the economic, social, and political arenas, the Black woman educator's quest for autonomy and opportunity is encumbered, and issues that

uniquely affect Black women are often overlooked (Collins, 1989, 2002; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw; 1991; Hine, 1996; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Taylor, 1998). Consequently, Black women have developed a deep-rooted understanding that if we want to see social and economic equality, then we as Black women, must act as agents of our own empowerment (Pratt-Clarke, 2013; Taylor, 1998). As Collins (2015) wrote, “no one else *sets* you free; rather, you empower yourself when your particular freedom struggle is part of a broader social justice project” (Collins, 2015, n.p.). This is demonstrated in the way that Black women educators and activists created their own childcare facilities and educational institutions to support the working-mothers and children in their segregated communities.

Black women educators, care providers, mothers, and activists have been a force of justice and social reform for centuries, creating collaborative networks in sisterhood to uplift themselves, their children, and their communities. The tacit bonds of Black sisterhood—a loyalty and connection to other women stemming from shared oppression (Collins, 1989)— is deeply rooted in Black women’s cultural understanding. This bond of kinship extends beyond traditional notions of “family” and accounts for historical and communal bonds with others in the struggle across physical and social locations (Collins, 1989).

BWECs occupy a unique social space where they are able to identify with low-wage, Black working mothers because they are them and support them. Approximately one-third of Black women work in jobs characterized by low wages, erratic work hours, job instability, and poor working conditions. These jobs include cooks, waitresses, laundry workers, health aides, and domestic servants— all with a median wage of less than \$10.50 per hour (Collins, 2002; Johnson-Staub, 2017; Pratt-Clarke, 2013). Many of the women are mothers of young children and rely on BWECs to care for their children while they work (Brewster & Padavic, 2002). As

a result, BWECs within low-income communities have risen to the role of community mothers in caring for not only the children of the community, but their mothers and fathers as well (Tuominen, 2003). The role BWECs play within the larger social context with other Black women increases the importance of centering the voice of BWECs, who are widely unrecognized pillars of support in the Black community (Tuominen, 2003).

Contrary to notions that Black women have been silent or complacent in inequitable and unjust conditions, Black feminist epistemology pushes back and interrogates systemic racism, sexism, and unbalanced power in education and in larger society. Black women scholars and intellectuals, both in and outside of the education institution, have created independent and oppositional knowledges concerning their own subjugation. This knowledge is constructed through and towards engaging in the struggle to reconceptualize all dimensions of oppression and activism as it applies to Black womanhood. Reclaiming Black women's ideas involves discovering, reinterpreting, analyzing, and reclaiming our narratives that have been silenced throughout history (Collins, 2002; Dillard, 2000, Pratt-Clarke, 2013; Tillman, 2002).

Black women rebel negative, controlling representations of Black womanhood and empower ourselves through self-definition and self-valuation (Collins 2002, 2015; Davis, 2018; Dillard, 2000; Taylor, 1998). We confront and dismantle overarching and interlocking structures of domination in terms of race, class, and gender oppression through cultivating and sharing everyday knowledge, intellectual thought, and political activism (Collins 2002, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2018; Taylor, 1998). Rooted in our distinct cultural heritage and sisterhood, we (re)generate the energy and skills needed to resist and transform daily discrimination (Collins, 1989, 2002; Dillard, 2000; Majors, 2004; Taylor, 1998). Centuries of social, economic, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual pressing has fortified the souls of Black mothers, daughters, and

sisters. Our legacy is forged of dignity, creativity, cultural knowledge, ancestral wisdom, resiliency, and survival—the weight of Blackness.

Black Motherhood. In emphasizing the narratives of Black woman, there is need for a Black feminist analysis of Black motherhood. This is especially important given that 90% of family childcare providers are mothers themselves and one-third of them care for their own children in addition to non-related children (Gerstenblatt, et al., 2014). Similar to research of Black women, Black motherhood has often been mis-represented from the male perspective. Citing high rates of divorce, female-headed households, and out-of-wedlock births, white male scholars have claimed that Black mothers wield “unnatural” power in allegedly deteriorating family structures (Collins, 2002; Moynihan, 1965).

However, these white scholars lack understanding and respect for the multidimensionality of Black motherhood (Collins, 2002; Joseph, 1984). They fail to see the great love, admiration, and respect that Black sons and daughters hold for their mothers, who have been beacons of strength and tradition within our community. Black mothers, othermothers, and care providers often act as role models in teaching their children how to succeed against overwhelming odds (Joseph, 1984). Black mothers, more than their racial counterparts, bear the responsibility of preparing their children to manage the constant societal pressures of race, ethnicity, class and power, white superiority, and societal perceptions of Blackness. A part of our cultural knowledge is knowing that for Black children, these lessons can be a matter of physical and mental health— even life or death (Feagin & Van Ausdale, 2001; Hughes, 2004; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009).

Accordingly, Black mothers, in the home and in the classroom, talk with their children to prepare them for race-based bias, prejudice, and discrimination (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Suizzo,

et al., 2008). Suizzo's (2008) study showed that although they want their children to understand Black history and heritage, Black mothers often feel the need to protect their children from the brutality of slavery, the legacy of discrimination, and the violence of the Jim Crow era. As such, part of Black motherhood is the pain of having to censor our historical narratives and the experiences of our ancestors by substituting terms like "the struggle" for the details of Black American heritage.

Black Women in Community Education

Scholarship on Black women's social history illustrates Black women educators' persistence within the community as intergenerational resources sustaining Black families. Black women's community activism differs from that of Black men due to the intersectionality of gendered and racial experiences of Black womanhood, including mothering and othermothering (Tuominen, 2003). Still, Black women family childcare providers have become an indispensable source of resistance capital for the Black community and an essential element for the support of children and families.

Although numerous studies show that Black cultural knowledge has a significant positive effect on child development, Black women early childhood educators (BWECEs) and their worldviews have often been disregarded—even when race was the topic (Boutte, & Strickland, 2008; Delpit, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner, 2006). Similarly, despite the significant number of children in family childcare settings, little attention has been given to the experiences of the childcare providers outside of how their work impacts child development (Atkinson, 1988; Morrissey, 2007; Tuominen, 2003). hooks (1994) writes that "Black female teachers carry with them gendered experiences and perspectives that have been (historically) silenced and marginalized in the discourses about teaching and learning" (p.91).

However, in opposition to universalized colonial knowledge, Black women educators have entered the profession as part of a Black feminist tradition dedicated to the maintenance of Black cultural practices, resistance to racial and economic oppression, and the development of Black youth (Collins, 2002; Dougherty, 2004; Royal & Gibson, 2004). Black educators' pedagogy resists the social-political marginalization of their people and cultural heritage. Instead, their pedagogy fights to enfranchise and advance the Black community (Collins, 2002; Dougherty, 2004; Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Royal & Gibson, 2004). For example, before the integration of public schools by the *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka (1954)* decision, experienced, dedicated, and skilled Black educators built a legacy of consistently high expectations for Black students' success through their dedication, demanding teaching style, and an overwhelming sense of ownership and responsibility (Dougherty, 2004; Haskin, 1998; Milner, 2006; Walker, 2000).

Within the early education setting of the Black community, Naples (1992) identified this sense of ownership and responsibility as a form of "activist mothering." She explained,

Activist mothering not only involves nurturing work for those outside one's kinship group, but also encompasses a broad definition of actual mothering practice. The community workers defined *good mothering* to comprise all actions including social activism, that addressed the needs of the children and their community—variously defined as their racial-ethnic group, low-income people, or members of a particular neighborhood. (Naples, 1992, p.448).

Similarly, Tuominen (2003) recognizes Black early educators and care providers' work of "social motherhood" (p.168) as a sort of community activism to address the needs of children and families. All of these forms of community care and education are centered on the

maintenance of Black community culture, resistance to oppression and social disenfranchisement, and the development of Black youth (Collins, 2002; Dougherty, 2004; Naples, 1992; Royal & Gibson, 2004; Tuominen, 2003).

Othermothering and Community Mothering. Whether through social motherhood (Boris, 1993), activist mothering (Naples, 1992), or social care work (Tuominen, 2003), othermothering—the shared responsibility of raising children—reaches deep into Black women’s cultural heritage (Foster, 1993; Collins, 2005; Loder, 2005). It is the manifestation of a tacit sense of collectivism represented by the African proverb, “I am because we are, and therefore, we are because I am.” (Akbar, 1991; Allen & Bagozzi 2001; Carson, 2009; Nobles, 1991). The Black community’s boundary is an abstract, yet tangible force that separates insiders from outsiders. As a survival tactic, collectivism is characterized by an individual’s sense of connection to and responsibility for the advancement, safety, and security of the members in their group (Taylor & Moghaddam 1994; Triandis et al., 1988). Sacks (1989) explains,

This is very different from the opposition between group and individual in dominant white American cultural constructs. [...] Afro-American women and the Afro-American feminism that derives from their experiences as everyday black women—are central to culture and community-building by virtue of their place in families. (p. 540)

As members of this cultural community, Black childcare providers and educators often embody a strong sense of collectivism and critical race consciousness not only about education, but societal race relations as well (Acosta, 2019; Tuominen, 2003).

Tuominen (2003) found that Black women childcare providers’ commitment to serving families in need is rooted within the cultural meaning and construction of social networks as a means of sustaining the community. She goes on to explain that “kinwork”—the collective work

expected from family-centered networks across and within households— is what families need to endure over time. Kinwork “regenerates families, maintains lifetime continuities, sustains intergenerational responsibilities, and reinforces shared values” (Stack & Burton, 1993, p. 160) similar to the “familial capital” described by Yosso (2005). Similar to kinwork, Yosso (2005) describes “familial capital” as the knowledge produced and nurtured through kinship that extends beyond traditional notions of what “family” means, accounting for historical and communal bonds with others. Various studies demonstrate the way family childcare providers, especially in the Black community, provide kinwork and familial capital for the children and parents they serve (Gerstenblatt et al., 2014; Tuominen, 2003). In short, FCPs are vital part of the consciously constructed connections developed from a family’s economic, social, physical, and psychological needs (Tuominen, 2003).

Black family care providers also represent a significant source of “social capital,” which Yosso (2005) describes as “networks of people and community resources” that exist to help Communities of Color navigate unjust social systems (p. 79). Like Black parents who share navigation strategies and cultural knowledge rooted in their own racialized experiences with their children, research illustrates that Black educators beyond the early education setting express collectivism through teaching skills and strategies they have learned through their own experience to help students and their parents navigate race-based experiences (Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Roberts, 2010). In the childhood setting and throughout secondary education, Black educators often view themselves as cultural translators who prepare their students for the race-based challenges they will encounter. Because of their experiential cultural insights, Black care providers and educators agree that Black children need teachers who understand the racial realities of Black America (Acosta, 2019; Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Tuominen, 2003).

Moreover, the Black women educators in Acosta's (2019) study felt there were strategies and a level of awareness that a Black child needed to learn, which could not easily come from a teacher who did not share the same cultural experiences as that child. This fostered a sense of intergenerational collectivism or symbolic kinship in which individuals cared for others they were not biologically related to in order to sustain the community. One participant stated, "if you've never lived it [racial oppression], how can you encourage our kids to do better[...]" (Acosta, 2019, p. 30). The teachers reasoned that because of the trauma of forced immigration and enslavement, "takin care of everybody in the community is innate"—a characteristic of our people that was passed down "from generation to generation, to generation, to generation" (Acosta, 2019, p. 31).

The term "othermothering" has been used by Black scholars to express the sense of care, responsibility, and kinship that manifests within the Black community through aunts, grandmothers, family friends, and educators who share in the social and cultural responsibility of raising children who are not of their own blood (Acosta, 2019; Foster, 1993; Loder, 2005). Similar to collectivism, that is rooted in the legacy of slavery, the concept of othermothers is a survival mechanism adopted into the Black community when enslaved children and their biological parents were torn apart at the auction block. Consequently, other enslaved women would take up the responsibility and self-sacrifice of mothering the orphaned children as their own (Berry & Gross, 2020; Case, 1997). This tradition is now sustained in the Black community as "Black mothers are expected to pass on the torch to their daughters, who are expected to become the next generation of mothers, grandmothers, or othermothers, to guard future generations" (Bernard & Bernard, 1998, p. 46).

In studies of the way Black women educators engage with their Students of Color in an academic setting, othermothering plays an integral role in meeting the psychoeducational needs of the children (Acosta, 2019; Case, 1997; Foster, 1993; Loder, 2005). One teacher described working with her students as if she was working with her own children, “Well, I don’t think I can separate being a parent from my job as a teacher. Because I’m teaching my own children, I look at the children that I serve as an extension of me. I want them to go out and be their very best, because they represent me” (Griffin & Tackie, 2016, n.p.).

Within the early childhood setting, Suransky and Polakow (1982) described their observations of othermothering through the “grandmother program” at the Martin Luther King Childcare Center, which serviced predominately Black children from diverse home situations. The volunteers acted as surrogate grandmothers for the children and staff of the center. Suransky and Polakow (1982) explained that the grandmothers, “from their matriarchal seats in the front of the room, each would act as nurturer, comforter, and disciplinarian” (p. 146). Their warmth and love were “extremely powerful;” and their authority and wisdom were revered by the children and staff alike. The grandmothers represented the link between home/ family and school. “They were the bearers of a traditional black culture [...] They replicated and transmit those social bonds which, historically, anchored the black family” (Suransky & Polakow, 1982, p. 148).

Called to Serve. In my investigation of Black women in education, it became highly evident that Black women care providers and educators are often rooted in their communities and the understanding that they play a crucial role in the dissemination of cultural knowledge and navigational capital (Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Roberts, 2010; Tuominen, 2003; Yosso, 2005). In their study of 150 Black elementary school teachers, Griffin and Tackie (2016) found that many Black teachers became educators because they wanted to passionately and authentically advocate

for their community to make a difference. Moreover, many of the Black women educators in their study felt they were “called” to serve in the classroom. They held high expectations for their students, a passion for teaching, and the capacity to empower students with knowledge and wisdom.

Similarly, Tuominen (2003) noted that many of the Black family care providers in her study expressed spiritual motivation or a call to serve their community through child care. The FCPs were intentional about serving their communities—especially low-income families who qualified for government subsidies—because they recognized the effects of systemic racism and economic segregation within their neighborhoods. With the understanding that they were “doing something for God,” the FCPs set their rates to be accessible to families in need. One provider specifically expressed that family childcare was something given to her by God for her community. The work not only was part of her identity, it was a part of her essence or spiritual makeup. Despite the poor working conditions, lack of professional respect, and low wages associated with beginning a FCP, “providers drawn by God to the field do not perceive their work in this way. They have been called to the work by the Holy Spirit, called to serve children with special needs, called to contribute labor essential to the advancement of their communities” (Tuominen, 2003, p. 162).

A part of Black educators’ cultural knowledge is an understanding that an underprepared Black child, in a society that does not want or expect them to succeed, could likely fall into drug abuse, prison, or even death. Therefore, Black educators, dedicated to serving the community’s children, work even harder for their students’ success (Milner, 2007). Tuominen (2003) calls the conscious commitment to community betterment and survival through care and education

“community care work” (p.157). Through their community care work, Black FCPs consciously contribute to the economic and cultural survival of the community.

Scholarship shows Black women care providers and educators of children across age-groups share the concern that if they do not care and teach, Black children will not be held to high expectations or be encouraged to reach the academic and social success they are capable of (Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Tuominen, 2003). Accordingly, Black educators, committed to improving the lives of their students, insist that their students reach their full capacity. This commitment is rooted in the care providers’ and educators’ life experiences that have helped them recognize systemic structures that perpetuate the social-political and economic disenfranchisement of low-income Black community members (Tuominen, 2003). They understand that allowing students to “just get by” can leave them in their current situation or even worse (Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Milner, 2006; Milner & Richard, 2013).

As illustrated in the previous sections, the history of Black womanhood in America is a complex interplay of determination, strength, spirituality, and innovation. Our strivings have woven the tenets of our cultural knowledge and give Black women early childhood care providers and educators a unique perspective of society and of the early childhood context.

A Black Feminist Perspective of the Early Childhood Context

In the United States, early care professionals work in a variety of settings including private childcare centers, Head Start, state-funded pre-K, and public-school early childhood programs (Blank, 2010; Klein & Chen, 2001). Among family childcare providers (FCPs), there are certified FCPs in which a single provider is able to care for up to four children. There are also licensed FCPs, where providers are able to care for up to eight children at a time. When more than eight children are cared for at a time, the facility is considered center-based.

FCP professionals are predominantly women, many are mothers of young children, and frequently, they are Women of Color. As Black women early childhood educators (BWECEs), FCPs face unique challenges in early childhood education (ECE)— a field governed by a white middle-class agenda. This agenda pushes the acculturation and assimilation of People of Color, immigrants, and “others” (Johnson-Staub, 2017; Kendi, 2019; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Suransky & Polakow, 1982). Furthermore, childcare and early education policies are shaped by a history of systemic and structural racism. Racial inequities have resulted in minimal access to equitable childcare for Children of Color (Cahan, 1989; Johnson-Staub, 2017). Black women FCPs are most likely to work with Black children and families, due to the high segregation in the field (racially and social-economically). Yet, they operate under regulatory agencies that privilege white values and norms. Moreover, Black women are often relegated to the lowest-paid positions (Frankenberg, 2016; Johnson-Staub, 2017).

A Two-Tiered/Two Track System: Racism and Classism in Early Childhood Education

The disparate quality of learning experiences in early care and education has always been based on socioeconomic standing and race (Cahan, 1989; Lomotey, et al., 2016; Suransky & Polakow, 1982). The two-tiered system within early childhood education was established in the 1830s with the implementation of day nurseries and nursery schools. Day nurseries provided low-standard, custodial services to primarily poor, white children so their mothers could work (Cahan, 1989; Lomotey, et al., 2016; Suransky & Polakow, 1982). On the other hand, Black women founded their own day nurseries due to discriminatory policies in the white day nurseries and the women’s social welfare legislation. When Black women founded their own day nurseries and early learning facilities, they received no monetary support from the U.S. government and

were instead funded through philanthropists and volunteerism (Cahan, 1989; Johnson-Staub, 2017; Suransky & Polakow, 1982; West, 2010).

On a parallel track, early nursery schools for educating and socializing white middle- and upper-class children were developed (Cahan, 1989; Suransky & Polakow, 1982). These early learning programs were geared toward preparing children for kindergarten and reproducing the social class structure. To this end, they used "best practices" inspired by German-based, Froebelian philosophy to develop white children socially, physical, and academically (Blank, 2010; Lomotey, et al., 2016; Suransky & Polakow, 1982). Similar to the day nurseries, there was an independent Black nursery school movement, in historically Black colleges and universities, that was born out of racial discrimination. The two tiers of the early education system were divided by social class, and the two tracks were divided by race. This siloed system has left an enduring mark on American early childhood educational policy and practice (Johnson-Staub, 2017), and the stigmatized perceptions of childcare as social welfare is still disproportionately weighed on the impoverished, working-class, and People of Color.

García and Weiss (2015) in their study, *Inequalities at the Starting Gate*, affirm decades of research that still connect parents' economic resources and the educational opportunities provided to their young children. Low-income parents often enroll their children into childcare centers that are poorly funded and lack the resources provided to children from middle-class, predominately white families. A low rated program spends, on average, \$9,000 annually to care for one child, compared to \$11,168 for a higher rated childcare program (Workman & Jessen-Howard, 2018). However, care for children remains disproportionately based on race, ethnicity, and most of all, socioeconomic status (SES) (Anyon, 1981; García & Weiss, 2015; Johnson-Straub, 2017).

Deficit Perspectives and Differential Knowledge. Most of 20th century early care and education is grounded in Eurocentric theories of child development and learning (e.g., Piaget, Montessori, Vygotsky, and others) to advocate what constitutes “quality” content and pedagogy for young children (Blaise & Ryan, 2019). The field’s allegiance to white middle-class standards of care, education, and child development is widely unrefuted and deeply embedded in American early education philosophy. Through this lens, Black and Brown children are othered and associated with low socioeconomic status, while whiteness is mainly associated with affluent and educated families (e.g., Frankenberg, 2016; Hart, 2002).

The racialized class divide in ECE has led to significant disparity in the way children of affluent, white families are perceived compared to low-income Black and Brown children (Anyon, 1981; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Kliebard, 2004). Consequently, Children of Color and of low SES are consistently perceived through cultural, linguistic, and school-readiness deficits that propose children need to be “fixed” through education. Contrastingly, the developmental patterns of white, middle-class children are positioned as the norm (e.g., Cople & Brendcamp, 2009). For example, Black and white parents equally rate their children’s persistence, approaches to learning, and social interactions. But, when rated by teachers, the same Black students are distinctly rated lower than whites in these skills. This discrepancy in teacher/parent perceptions is even more visible in ratings of children’s level of self-control (García & Weiss 2015).

Early childhood education research has also propagated deficit perspectives of children and families from diverse populations in the discussion of language use and acquisition. Hart and Risley's (1992) research on children’s language claimed that children growing up in poverty hear 30 million fewer words than their more affluent counterparts by the age of three. Their sample

included 42 families at four levels of income and education ranging from "welfare" to "professional class." All of the "welfare" families and 7 out of the 10 "working class" families in the Hart and Risley (1992) study were Black, while 9 out of 10 of the "professional" families were white.

Hart and Risley (1992) determined that children living poverty were disadvantaged before entering kindergarten because they were not exposed to a similar number and range of vocabulary words as their more affluent counterparts. Their findings suggest that in order for children to be prepared for school, anyone from a non-white, low-SES background must imitate the way predominately white, middle-class people interact with their children. Subsequently, “vocabulary” has become a type of code word for the racial and class-based inequities of public schools (Kamenetz, 2018). These findings have left a lasting mark on the way educators, parents, and policymakers think about linguistic backgrounds and the education of impoverished children, and they have inspired increased federal investments in Head Start and Early Head Start (Kamenetz, 2018).

The discussion of vocabulary deficits and effective language use is another reflection of how the public school system often invalidates the cultural ways of being of children and families who do not ascribe to white, middle-class values (Cazden, 1988; Emdin, 2016; McMillion & Edwards, 2000; Royal & Gibson, 2017). Furthermore, this discourse illustrates how Children of Color are expected to assimilate and compromise their culture in order to succeed within the education setting (Emdin, 2016; Kendi, 2019). Policymakers steadfastly call for higher quality, interventionist early education to bring the development of impoverished Children of Color “closer to the developmental trajectory typical of children from educated, affluent families” (Coppole & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 7). Subsequently, much of the research in

early childhood education has focused on addressing the perceived root causes of academic and economic failure—the child’s home environment (Brown & Barry, 2019; Delaney, et al., 2019). Because of the way teachers perceive Children and Communities of Color, they often narrow the learning opportunities offered to young learners. Children’s educational access is determined by a perceived social destination that works to reproduce the social class structure (Anyon, 1981; Kliebard, 2004; Mueller & File, 2019). For example, Early and colleagues (2010) found that in preschool classrooms of children from more affluent families, there was increased free choice time and child autonomy. However, when classrooms enrolled Black children, time spent in teacher-assigned settings and daily routines increased. Furthermore, classrooms with Latin@ children were found to have higher proportions of time spent in teacher-assigned tasks and language/literacy activities.

Similarly, in her observation of second and fifth grade classrooms, Anyon (1981) noted in lower- and working-class schools, teacher control of the students was a high priority. Students were given little exposure to the conceptual and critical understanding of the world or their situation in the world. Instead, there was an emphasis on curriculum and mechanical behaviors as opposed to sustained conception. The working-class children were not offered the cultural capital, knowledge, or skills to manipulate ideas in their own interest, towards their liberation, or social mobility.

In contrast, middle- and upper-class schools, students were taught the commodification of knowledge, which helped legitimize and reproduce the ideology of production for consumption as well as the child’s belief in the possibility of success for herself. Within this mid to upper class setting, there was high value placed on creativity and personal decision-making (Anyon, 1981). These studies suggest the types of knowledge and skills given children from different

racial- and class groups consistently privilege white, middle-class children (Early, et al., 2010; Johnson-Straub, 2017). Because the education system is designed for white, middle-class children by white theorists and policymakers, low-income children from diverse, non-white backgrounds are consistently deemed socially and academically unprepared (Cahan, 1989; Cople & Bredekamp, 2009; Fischberg, 2017; Frankenberg, 2016).

When low-income, racially and linguistically diverse children are pushed closer to the developmental trajectory of children from educated, affluent families, they are increasingly taught and assessed on mandated knowledge and skills that may or may not reflect what is culturally relevant to them and their communities (Brown & Barry, 2019). Moreover, early education curriculum and best practices often disregard the “cultural wealth” (Yosso, 2005) of children and their families. Instead, they privilege white norms and values over “others,” thus fortifying a white, middle-class conception of school readiness that disengages and disempowers Children of Color (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Brown & Barry, 2019; Pérez & Saavedra, 2017).

In addition to the inequitable distribution and value of knowledge, policymakers’ and educational researchers’ deficit perspective toward Children of Color has posited early childhood education as an economic investment in the inoculation for poverty. A study by the Consortium for Longitudinal Studies, in the 1960s, showed that “quality” pre-K experiences increased high school graduation rates and lifetime income, while reducing teen pregnancy, crime rates, and juvenile delinquency (Brown & Barry, 2019; Delaney, et al., 2019; Workman & Jessen-Howard, 2018). Therefore, every dollar spent on preschool programs potentially returns between three and six dollars to taxpayers (due to lower rates of grade retention, use of special education, and use of welfare and criminal justice systems) (Blank, 2010).

With early education perceived as an economic investment, early childhood programs are pressured to produce “successful” learners who become earners and consumers. In time, the learners will repay the state for the initial costs of “quality” early education by requiring less governmental support and paying taxes through employment later in life (Brown & Barry, 2019; Delaney, et al., 2019; Heckman, 2011; Workman & Jessen-Howard, 2018). However, policymakers’ focus on “fixing” racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse children often overlooks the inequitable systems that disenfranchise them in the first place (Blaise & Ryan, 2019; Brown & Barry, 2019; Delaney, et al., 2019; Delpit, 2006; Emdin, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

The deficit perspectives within the field of early childhood education not only affect low-income, Children and Families of Color (Ullucci & Howard, 2015; Yosso, 2005), but also the Educators of Color who serve them. Due to the high racial and socio-economical segregation in the field, Black women early childhood educators are most likely to work with Black children before they enter kindergarten and early schooling (Frankenberg, 2016). With externally determined standards for quality care and education, BWECs balance their cultural ways of childrearing and guidance with what is deemed relevant by policies, governing agencies, and professional associations that privilege white values and norms (Johnson-Staub, 2017; Lent, 2016).

White, middle-class standards of care, education, and child development (e.g., Piaget, Montessori, Vygotsky, and others) are foundational to ECE’s widely unrefuted definition of quality care and best practices. These notions of quality care manifest as overwhelming whiteness (white value and norms at the exclusion of other perspectives) in early childhood curricula, policies, evaluations, and assessment (Suransky & Polakow, 1982). The assimilationist

intentions that devalue the cultural contributions of children and their communities are just one aspect of traditional early care and education. Social learning theorists and psychoanalysts paint young Children of Color as overly aggressive and sexualized beings. Freudian-behaviorists, cognitive developmentalists, and neo-Piagetian theorists have each contributed to dominant images of childhood and the subsequent structure of our education system (Suransky & Polakow, 1982). Low-income, Black, and Latin@ children are depicted as “aggressive” primitives to be socialized through the school where “generations of children are medicated out of consciousness, or manipulated [...] to submit to a regimen of reinforcement and extinction contingencies in order to bring about the desired behavioral effects (Suransky & Polakow, 1982, p.23).

Consequently, white, middle-class ideologies— which encourage early care providers to assimilate masses of children from diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds— have constructed the inequitable, culturally unresponsive policies and practice of modern childcare. This universalization of whiteness in early childhood education has perpetuated an oppressive institutional paradigm that drowns out “other” perspectives, cultural knowledge, and ways of being—including those of Black women early educators.

As it pertains to FCPs, there remains a question as to whether the universalized views of what constitutes “quality” in early childhood can adequately account for the various styles of teaching within and between programs. There are various ways to achieve child development, and while many family providers have embraced principles of child development, they are often assessed according to the standardized processes of “teaching and learning in specifically designed settings that reflect dominant ideology assumptions of normal behavior” (Lent, 2016, p.36). These assumptions of universalization and standardization create implications for family childcare and early education.

Professionalization of Family Childcare and Early Education. The persistent deficit perspectives and assimilation of Communities and Children of Color forms the backdrop of top-down educational reform, which pushes the standardization and professionalization of childcare. Professions are defined by the presence of standards, specialized knowledge, expertise, and experience demonstrated by members of a profession (Brown, 2009). A profession also implies there is a certain “public acceptance of the legitimacy” of the occupation and, the work is something the public perceives to serve a significant social need (Brown, 2009, p. 8).

The providers in Lent’s (2016) study expressed that “participation in regulation as a licensed or certified provider, attending training, taking classes, and engaging in advocacy as members of early childhood associations and support groups are all important aspects of professionalism” (p. 81). Lent (2016) also found many of the providers in her study appreciated regulation and licensing as an intrinsic motivation and for the support they received to stay up to date with the safety and health standards for the children they served. However, she also noted a change in this positivism as the licensing standards became more stringent and providers encountered more challenges in the regulation process and monitoring visits. Some providers complained that the once supportive visits became increasingly punitive. Nonetheless, in most states, including the local state of study, providers are legally obligated to apply for a state license before caring for more than three non-relative children (Lent, 2016).

In addition to individual state licensing and regulations, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and other agencies (i.e., Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education [MACTE] or the National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs [NAC]) have established accreditation systems that set and assess standards for quality early childhood education programs (Brown, 2009). Program accreditation

assumes that the program has demonstrated the standards of quality and professionalism put forth by the accrediting agency, which exceed the basic professional licensure regulations set by the state (Brown, 2009).

Research on early development blames early educators' lack of professionalization for the poor educational outcomes among low-income, minoritized students (Barnett, 2003, 2008; Jorde-Bloom, 1988; Rushton & Larkin, 2001). Historically, early childhood education has been the least controlled classroom setting, designed as child-centered and nurturing (Bullough, et al., 2014). BWECEs have long understood the development of young Black children and have established developmental schedules and curriculum based on the understanding of Black children's needs within the context of their communities (West, 2010). The recent press toward the universalization and professionalization of the field imposes on the way that BWECEs and other Communities of Color educate young children within the childcare setting. Furthermore, larger school discourses challenge the uniqueness and validity of early childhood education by using terms like "evidence-based practices," "teacher effectiveness," and "accountability" in terms of "child outcomes." These words carry underlying assumptions that teaching and learning are only valuable if they can be measured and assessed by white middle-class standards (Blank, 2010).

According to Urban (2008), "Evidence-based practice, as something derived from educational science as a means of knowledge production, [...] disqualifies practitioners and deprives them of their professional autonomy. Moreover, it actively hinders a practice that is consistently developed by asking critical questions" (p. 142). This illuminates the impact on BWECEs, as they are directed on what to do, what works, and what counts by state licensing regulations, NAEYC's developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), quality rating and

improvement systems (QRIS), and other regulatory agencies (Goepel, 2012; Urban, 2008).

Furthermore, each of these agencies have varying definitions of quality and professionalism that are rooted in white-middle class knowledge systems and imposed on BWECs, often without the contribution of educators working directly with children in their communities (Urban, 2008).

The persistence of managerial professionalism, restrictive government policies, and rising accountability practices makes it increasingly difficult for BWECs to focus on developing meaningful pedagogical practices that meet the individual child's personal, sociocultural, linguistic, and developmental capabilities (Brown, 2009; Brown & Barry, 2019). For example, in a qualitative study of 50 family childcare providers, Nelson (1990) found the FCPs showed concern that participating in regulating agencies would interfere with their ability to be responsive to the needs and values of the parents of their programs and inhibit their ability to make their own decisions regarding the needs of their business. Early educators are expected to participate in "tick-box professionalism where teachers demonstrate the expected behaviors but out of compliance and in an environment of distrust rather than through the expression of their intrinsic professional characteristics or qualities" (Goepel, 2012, p. 500).

Therefore, while BWECs enter their classrooms with significant cultural knowledge and experience to impart to their young learners, they must focus on paperwork, standards, measures of performance and outcomes, and meeting accountability standards (Bullough, et al., 2014; Goepel, 2012). This is an indirect yet persistent way in which classist and racist ideologies of the dominant early childcare field erase diverse perspectives. Additionally, Tuominen (2003) found that some family childcare providers who became regulated, no longer associated with providers who were non-regulated. Therefore, the effects of standardization and regulation not only affects

young learners but can deteriorate relationships within provider networks and reinforce a class-based workforce division (Tuominen, 2003).

Low Wages and Higher Education. In addition to diminishing early educators' decision-making power, challenging their professionalism, and devaluing their experiential knowledge, new legislation and educational policy require more and more formal education (Blank, 2010). Early childhood education's use of developmental approaches to learning are dichotomous with the more formal, academic approaches to early schooling (Blank, 2010; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Subsequently, early childhood education teachers are increasingly pressured by regulatory agencies such as NAEYC, quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS), and other educational reforms to become legitimized in the field through attaining higher degrees of learning like their counterparts in elementary education.

The current study's local state requires licensed family care providers to complete a minimum of 70 hours of non-credit childcare courses. The 70 course hours include an introduction to childcare course, training in infant and toddler care, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), shaken baby syndrome (SBS), sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), the state early learning standards, and family childcare business training. In addition, FCPs must gain a minimum of 15 hours of continuing education each year (Lent, 2016). Within the local QRIS, providers' level of formal education is the most consequential as one cannot advance to the next rating level without attaining a certain level of education—despite the quality rating of other areas of their program (QRIS, n.d.).

The QRIS operates through the Department of Children and Families which subsidizes the childcare costs of low-income families. Programs that are considered high quality receive up to a 25 percent increase in their government subsidies as incentive to continue providing “high

quality” care. However, a program that receives a low rating will receive fewer funds for the families they serve who use governmental childcare subsidies. Subsequently, care providers who lack formal education, yet serve low-income, subsidized families will not be compensated as much for caring for those children (QRIS, n.d).

While few would dispute the importance of teacher education and professional development, the tension lies in how childcare providers who serve low-income children and families are more greatly affected by QRIS legislation that pushes higher education. In addition, contention is created by the growing demand of higher training and education requirements in spite of the very low recompense (Boyd, 2013; Dresser, et al., 2016).

The average annual income for childcare workers in 2014 was \$19,730, well below the national poverty level of \$23,850 annual income for a family of four in that same year (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). An early childhood teacher with an associate degree in early childhood education can expect to start at \$10 per hour and will rarely make more than \$13 — compared to \$18.57 per hour for others in the state workforce who hold an associate degree in a different field. The gap for a bachelor’s degree is even larger (Dresser, et al., 2016). A family childcare provider earns, on average, \$2500 per month while incurring costs of \$1000. Therefore, the providers’ monthly net earnings are \$1500 per month, or \$7.50 per hour of work. To supplement the low compensation of their childcare businesses, most family providers also rely on another source of income, and 67 percent rely on their spouse’s income (Dresser, et al., 2016). As such, early care and education professionals are compensated near minimum wage, comparable to the earnings of fast-food cooks, bank tellers, and animal caretakers—occupations with comparable or lower educational requirements (Dresser, et al., 2016; Fothergill, 2013).

The numbers illustrate a grave disconnect between the perceived importance of investing in children's early years and the value placed on the women in the workforce charged with carrying out the task. Tuominen (2003) calls this disparity between the public need for childcare and the actual public funding devoted to childcare the "care penalty" (p.7). This term illustrates how the low wages, lack of benefits, and reduction in future wage earnings experienced by childcare professionals is a literal "penalty" they pay for their care service. With weak benefits and low wages, that have remained virtually the same since 1997 (Dresser, et al., 2016; Fothergill, 2013), it is understood why many early childhood educators prefer not to pursue degrees in early childhood education (Bandon, et al., 2005). Paying for this education is especially problematic for BWECEs, who are often relegated to the lowest paying positions in the field (Johnson-Straub, 2017) and those providers who serve low-income families using government subsidies.

Essential not Expendable. Given the devaluation of the early childcare profession, it follows that early educators were unrecognized among the essential workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, early educators and childcare professionals were given the responsibility of caring for children of medical staff, first responders, and other essential workforces while their own health and protection were treated as afterthoughts by policymakers and state officials (Essential Not Expendable, n.d.).

Contrastingly, Stuart Appelbaum, the president of the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union, was quoted saying, "During the pandemic, people have noticed the value of the jobs essential workers do [...] They are jobs that are more important than those that are more compensated" (Murphy, 2020). For example, grocers, delivery people, and schoolteachers were praised for their jobs that were taken for granted in pre-COVID times. Front lawns, billboards,

and windows across the nation announced “All heroes don’t wear capes” to give accolades to health care workers for their persistence and bravery on the frontlines of the fight against the disease. Various states published lists of professions deemed “essential” to acknowledge industries and agencies that needed to stay active during the mandated quarantine. An extensive list of essential workers, published by *Newsweek*, acknowledged those who “work behind the scenes without the general public realising how essential they are to keeping society functioning” (Waterfield, 2020, n.p.).

The essential workers listed included: food and agriculture workers, private and public health care workers, workers supporting the energy sector, waste and water waste workers, transportation and logistics workers, communications and information technology workers, community and government workers, those who work with hazardous materials, financial services, essential workers for defense industrial bases, and emergency personnel among others (Waterfield, 2020). However, the *Newsweek* list and others failed to recognize the role of the hundreds of thousands of childcare professionals and early educators needed to keep society functioning.

As such, even the official email sent to all registered childcare providers in the study’s local state did not acknowledge childcare as essential. It simply read:

Many of you have heard Governor [...] recently announced he plans to sign a “Safer at Home” order. The order will request all non-essential businesses to close and all non-essential workers to stay home to prevent the spread of COVID-19. All childcare programs serving health providers and essential workers are requested to stay open. You are providing a critical service in allowing essential workers to keep our communities safe and healthy. (DCF, personal communication, March 23, 2020)

In their attempt to solicit support from the local childcare workforce, the state government implicitly devalued the professionals in differentiating between them and the essential workforce. This message demonstrates the persistent stigma of non-professionalism from those outside of the field. Policymakers and governmental agencies can recognize the care and education of children as a “critical service” yet hesitate to acknowledge the labor force as essential professionals.

As evidenced by public perceptions prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic, the subject of Black women family childcare providers’ “professionalism” is paradoxical to our social-historical positioning. Public acceptance and legitimization have long evaded Black women in America. Black women have consistently fought for the acknowledgement, acceptance, and legitimization of our many contributions to both the field of education and society as a whole. If professional work must be defined as something that the predominantly white public perceives to serve a “significant social need” (Brown, 2009), educating young Black children from low socioeconomic class will never be fully received as a profession. My rationale is illustrated in Kerckhoff’s (1965) “paradox” of why national attention is given to educating impoverished Black children in the first place:

(a) It is only in an affluent age that we [the white middle- and upper- class] can be concerned with the poor—*they are an expensive luxury*; and (b) in our affluent age, we simply cannot afford to have the poor around. [italics added for emphasis] (p.361)

Kerckhoff (1965) goes on to explain that in both of these explanations is the assumption that when the white, middle- and upper-class economy takes a shift downward, whites

lose interest in the education of the poor either because we shall all be too poor to spend money on education or because [white people] shall no longer be bothered by the

differential affluence that today nags at the social conscious of the more well-to-do.

(p.361)

The deep insult of this quote is multidimensional. First, Kerckhoff (1965) diminishes impoverished, Black children as “an expensive luxury”— demonstrating how impoverished people are exploited as a status symbol against which the white, middle-class can measure their class and wealth. Secondly, equitable educational for all children is seen as an inconvenient “nag at the social conscious.” This comment exemplifies how white privilege disregards the reprehensible, racist sociohistorical context of American prosperity, and positions itself as a reluctant savior of impoverished Communities of Color. In essence, it shows the lack of commitment to social justice by the dominant group because it is their privilege to see or not to see the effects of perpetual systemic inequalities on Communities of Color. Kerckhoff’s (1965) article was published and propagated by the National Association for the Education of the Young Child (NAEYC), the organization responsible for advocating for early childhood professionals and the children they serve. Although it is over 50 years old, Kerckhoff’s (1965) writing represents the underlying deficit perspectives and white saviorism upon which the organization was founded over 50 years before it published the article.

With the persistence of racism and classism within the field of early care and education, the professionalism of Black women family childcare providers educating impoverished Children of Color cannot be fully appreciated. This was made evident in the way childcare professionals remained largely unrecognized even when a worldwide health crisis shook the foundations of long-standing social infrastructures established on the shoulders of low-income Communities of Color. For these reasons, it is imperative to illuminate Black women FCPs’ counternarratives and continue the work of acknowledging them as essential and not expendable.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The study and illumination of Black women's voices is a sacred and worthy work deserving of rigor and reverence. Black women scholars and intellectuals have created epistemological frameworks that reclaim our voice and agency as a way of talking back to systems of oppression that had long silenced us (Collins, 2002; Davis, 2018; Dillard, 2000; Majors, 2004). The epistemological, spiritual, and pedagogical Black feminist perspective acknowledges the complex intersections of culture, race, socioeconomic status, sexuality, nation, and gender in Black women's experiences (Dillard, 2016). My work with Black women early childhood educators (BWECEs) has multiple layers to be considered to appropriately and holistically interpret and represent their narratives. Through this multiple narrative case study, I seek to understand how BWECEs, specifically family childcare providers (FCPs), use cultural knowledge and various forms of capital to organize and support their communities in an era of significant social and economic hardship.

In this multiple case study, I share the stories of six Black women FCPs as they engage as community mothers, caring for children in the midst of a worldwide health crisis. My aim is to amplify their voice by capturing the complexity of their positionality and perspectives. Collins (2016a) described the serious, diligent, and thoughtful work that aims to dismantle unjust intellectual and social structures as being oppositional. As such, in opposition, I aim to illuminate the stories of FCPs (who labor within a low-paying, undervalued, and gendered field) and bring the women to the forefront as essential professionals. I engage in this work to offer a critical counter-perspective to the overrepresented narratives and epistemologies of white hegemony within the field of early education. I resist any overarching structure that would further marginalize the voices of the Black women care providers and educators who uphold the Black

working-class and the foundation of the American socio-economic system. With this intent, I used the rigor of qualitative inquiry and the guidance of generations of Black scholars, intellectuals, and philosophers before me to immerse myself in the sacred work of cultural inquiry and knowledge production within Black women's lives (Dillard, 2016).

My examination of FCPS' cultural ways is embodied in an approach, I call endarkened feminist narrative (EFN). In this inquiry process, my focus is in discerning how FCPS' cultural knowledge shapes their perspective of a worldwide pandemic that has disproportionately impacted impoverished Black communities (Graham & Brooks, 2020; Ray, 2020; Valentino-DeVries, et al., 2020). To present this research, I begin with a position statement, followed by an overview of my theoretical framework combining the tenets of critical race theory and Black feminist thought. Next, I explain my research design and the adaptation of the case narrative approach to my work with BWECEs. From there, I present data collection, the process of analysis, and principles of rigor.

Position Statement

Within my work, I acknowledge that I hold a unique perspective and various assumptions about what it means to be a Black woman educator working with Children of Color (Maxwell, 2012). Yet, I recognize I cannot generalize these assumptions to every Black woman childcare provider or assume that all BWECEs maintain a certain philosophy of care for their children or community (Milner, 2006). With this understanding, I have engaged in substantial work to understand my positionality as it pertains to my relationship to the population of my study. The following represents my thoughts on what it means for me to conduct this research as a critical scholar and an insider within the group of Black women early childhood educators.

I am a Black woman childcare program administrator, scholar, and an educator of early childhood teachers. Moreover, as a former preschool teacher within a Black-owned center-based childcare program with an all-Black teaching staff serving 98% Black children, I hold an inside perspective of the childcare field. This perspective leads to a strong commitment to respecting participants' cultural and contextual viewpoints (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Hunter, et al., 2002). Mills (2000), stated that, the “most admirable scholars within the scholarly community” do not split their work from their lives (p. 195). Instead, they use each for the enrichment of the other. Similarly, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) concluded that one's subjectivity is something to be embraced. Therefore, in my study of BWECs, I fully claim my identities as a Black woman, educator, and scholar as the foundation of my unique perspective and the story I tell (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2016).

My identity as *first* a Black woman and *then* a scholar is especially important for me in this work as, in the past, primarily white researchers have misrepresented Blackness and the experiences of Black lives through comparative quantitative data and culturally incongruent research methods (Collins & Blige, 2016; Davis, 2018; Few, et al., 2003; Milner, 2007; Tillman, 2002). As a result, Blackness and the experiences of Black people are often defined in terms of their difference from whiteness (Few, et al., 2003; Twine, 2000). Consequently, there is a deeply rooted mistrust of white researchers within the Black community and their ability to appropriately and accurately share the narratives of Black people and other people from marginalized backgrounds (Brandon, et al., 2005; Scharff, et al., 2010; Washington, 2006). Twine (2000) and Gilpin (2006) explain dissension by concluding (a) white people are incapable of grasping Black realities, and (b) because of the very nature of their experiences, Black and white people will approach subjects involving race with different interests and understandings.

As such, there are dimensions to the Black experience invisible to white investigators who possess neither the language or the cultural capacity to fully elicit or understand the experience (Rhodes, 1994).

According to Rhodes (1994), “closeness of identity and in particular, shared racial identity is generally presumed to promote effective communication between researcher and subject” (p. 549). Like scholars who have gone before me (Anna Julia Cooper, 1892-1988; Carter G. Woodson, 1933-1977; and W.E.B. Du Bois, -1973), I believe that to avoid the portrayal of BWECs by people who have limited knowledge of Black lives, the research and plans for advancing Black education should be predicated on an understanding of Black culture and historical context (Tillman, 2002). Therefore, within my research, my positionality as a member of the Black women educators’ group is not only a “racial match” (Twine, 2000), but will aid in curbing the tendency to misinterpret Black stories through white narration.

As a Scholar of Color, I recognize the urgency in cultivating a more holistic analysis of the realities of Black women by elevating their voices as a counternarrative to the perspectives created and maintained by white hegemony. This is my calling and the purpose of my work with Black women early educators and child care providers.

Theoretical Framework

From the reflection of my positionality and experiential knowledge, I have chosen to operate within the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory (CRT) (Bell, 1995; DeCuir & Stephanic, 2004) and, more specifically, Black feminist thought (BFT) (Collins, 2002, 2016).

Critical Race Theory

In this research, I relied on critical race theory (CRT) (DeCuir & Stephanic, 2004) to shift the focus away from dominant narratives, and to examine the way racism and white supremacy cyclically foster inequities in early education, the economy, the health care system, and every social institution. CRT's centering of the historical, social, and political contexts in which education, the health care system, and socio-economic power exist and its emphasis on counternarratives resonates deeply with my commitment to providing a more holistic depiction of the experiences of BWECEs.

In further describing the power of the counternarrative, Solorzano and Yosso (2002a, 2002b) identified five purposes that counternarratives serve in terms of theory, methodology, and pedagogy:

1. Counternarratives can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a familiar, human face to educational theory and practice.
2. They can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems.
3. They can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position.
4. Counternarratives can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone.
5. Finally, counternarratives can provide a context to understand and transform established belief systems.

Yosso (2005) further theorizes counternarratives through her community cultural wealth model (CCWM), which critically shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Color as places full of disadvantage and cultural poverty. Instead, the CCWM consists of six forms of capital (aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance). These forms of capital stand counter-hegemonically to Western patriarchal capitalism and give precedence to the intrinsic array of cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities of socially marginalized Communities of Color (Yosso, 2005; Yosso & García, 2007).

For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, low-income Communities of Color who already face the daily struggle of inequitable socio-economic systems were further disrupted with a major health crisis and exponential economic distress (Graham & Brooks, 2020; Ray, 2020; Valentino-DeVries, et al., 2020). In this current study, Yosso's (2005) model provides me with an approach from which to name racism as a key influence in the policies and processes that govern the inequitable health care and economic systems that affect the daily lives of People of Color. It also gives me the language to describe how Black women help the community navigate and resist unjust systems that would keep Black families exposed and disenfranchised during a national health crisis. Finally, Yosso's (2005) CCWM offers me a forum for the Black women FCPs of this study to insert their perspectives, act as agents of their self-empowerment, and resist dominant and deficit ideologies often placed on Women and Communities of Color (Collins, 1989, 2002, 2016; Collins & Blige, 2016; Davis, 2018; Farmer-Hinton, et al., 2013; Milner, 2007).

Black Feminist Thought

In addition to Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model (CCWM), Black feminist thought (BFT) contributes a strong critical theoretical framework for my study. As the offspring

of feminist and critical race theories, BFT validates the experiences and perspectives of Black women, while analyzing the meanings, social rules, values, and motives that govern action in a specific context (Collins, 1989, 2002, 2016; Few, et al., 2003). The four tenets of BFT provide the ideal framework for my study because they acknowledge the complexity of the behavioral and psychological characteristics of Black women within their familial, communal, societal, generational, and sociobiological environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Collins, 2016a).

Self-Definition and Self-Valuation. The first tenet of BFT asserts that Black women empower themselves through self-definition and self-valuation, which enable them to establish multiple positive images and repel negative, controlling representations of Black womanhood. Self-definition involves challenging the political knowledge and validation process that has resulted in externally defined, stereotypical images of Black womanhood (Collins, 1989, 2002; Davis, 2018). BFT demands that Black women not only self-define but engage in self-valuation. Self-valuation reframes this dialogue from merely focusing on the technical accuracy of an image to stressing the power dynamics underlying the process of definition itself (Davis, 2018). In opposition to the predominant judgement of “low-quality” or “inferior” care that pushes BWECs to justify their actions and intentions for their young learners, I created space for them to describe their own work and value within the classroom and the community.

Interlocking Identities. Secondly, BFT asserts that Black women confront and dismantle the overarching and interlocking structures of domination in terms of race, class, and gender oppression. The notion of interlocking identities recognizes that Black women are simultaneously marked by racial, gender, sexual, color, historical, socioeconomic status, and other stigmas. These stigmatized identities and the subsequent oppressions are not hierarchical; they are intersectional (Collins, 1990; Collins & Blige, 2016; Davis, 2018; Richie, 2012).

Moreover, a Black woman's socialization takes place at multiple familial, communal, and societal locations (Few, et al., 2003). Therefore, my study of the beliefs and experiences of Black women must account for the interplay of these different environments and the intersectionality of their various identities (Collins & Blige, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991).

Intertwined Intellectual Thought. Third, BFT states that through everyday knowledge, Black women intertwine intellectual thought and political activism. In contrast to the dominant perspective, BFT gives preference to Black women's way of creating synthesized meaning-making from an ever-shifting collective consciousness and the interpretation of collective wisdom, drawn from shared experiences (Collins, 1989; Richie, 2012). Collins (2002) explains that not all Black women intellectuals are educated, and not all Black women intellectuals work in academia. Therefore, my study acknowledges the intellectual contributions of BWECs as women who are outside of academia yet represent the interests and intellect of Black women as a group (Collins, 2002).

Standpoint Epistemology. The last tenet of BFT is standpoint epistemology, which argues Black women possess a distinct cultural heritage that gives them the energy and skills to resist and transform daily discriminations (Collins, 1989; Taylor, 1998). Because of this unique heritage, Black women not only understand their own standpoint, but are in the best position to evaluate and make claims about the meaning of it (Richie, 2012). Based on the assumption that Black women exist within systems of domination that objectively recast women's experiences to serve the interests of the elite, BFT is a specific standpoint theory that reframes this process for Black women. BFT privileges the expertise of those who have experienced a circumstance, rather than those who generate knowledge from an outsiders' perspective and thus lack an authentic understanding of behaviors, values, or historical antecedents (Davis, 2018; Richie,

2012). The data collection and analysis of my study is based on the understanding that as a scholar, I must yield my expertise, and that of existing research, to reestablish BWECs as the ultimate authority of their own identity and voice (Collins, 1989; Richie, 2012; Taylor, 1998).

Both critical race theory and Black feminist thought allow me to explore the historical, social, and political contexts in which Black women have developed their cultural knowledge through the power of counternarratives. Moreover, these lenses center the role of race, racism, gender, and white supremacy by interrogating the inequities perpetuated in education and other social structures.

Research Design

The following section will describe the intention and practices of the case study and narrative approach I have chosen for this study. Further, I will discuss how I have adapted the narrative approach to incorporate the unique dynamics of Black feminism towards conducting a critical, more culturally relevant investigation (Tillman, 2002).

Case Study

This case study of Black women early childhood educators, specifically FCPs, gathered the perspectives of six different participants through a community talk and two interviews (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2016). I examined the individual perspectives of the FCPs to reconstruct a more holistic, culturally informed counternarrative of their collective experience. The case study approach offers a means to challenge the ways Black women and BWECs have been overlooked and mis-portrayed in historical narratives of early care and education. I seek to critically dismantle negative, deficit-based images of BWECs and highlight the many ways they act as the backbone of the Black community.

In my study, each FCP Storyteller represents a “unit of study” or an individual case. They are nested within the collective experiences of BWECs working within the urban childcare setting (Patton, 2002). Presenting each FCP as an individual case is done in commitment to honoring the nuance of their stories as portrayed by their unique voices. Each Storyteller will have her own understanding or meaning of her work distinctive from the meaning created by the collective storytelling. The multiple case study approach adds to a more holistic interpretation of FCP narratives through an intensive exploration of each as a single “unit of study” that yields data from multiple sources (Hunter, et al., 2002, Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The FCPs are individuals who represent the voices of Black women early educators in family childcare programs within the study’s focus city. Therefore, I use their individual voices to better understand the collective voice of BWECs in the urban context, which cannot exist without the individuals (Patton, 2002). As I study the experiences and perspectives of FCPs in their various programs across the city, the multiple case study approach enables me to explore differences within and between the cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

A case study must be bound by place and time; therefore, the study is defined by the boundaries encasing the particular “unit” Storyteller (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Patton, 2002). The individual FCPs, as case units, are nested in the “place” of the family childcare programs within the city of focus. This setting offers unique characteristics of racial stratification, and is nested in the larger context of historical, political, and economic discriminatory policies and legislation, which tend to more heavily affect Educators of Color. This context, in turn, affects the daily lives and the experiential knowledge of the FCPs.

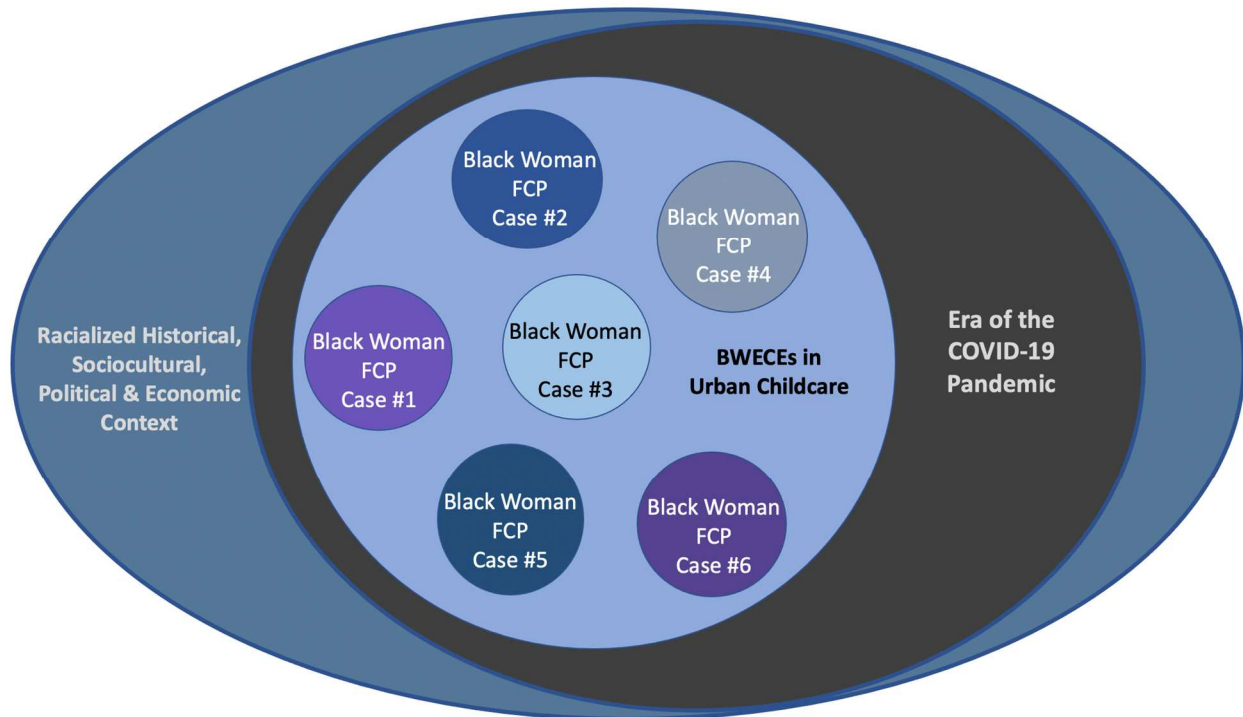
The boundary of time adds another layer to this case as I am studying the FCPs’ cultural knowledge specifically within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. I recognize that the

foundation of cultural knowledge is rooted in individuals’ beliefs, attitudes, values, and identities within their sociopolitical locations (Gilpin, 2006). This cultural knowledge— which helps us measure groups of people, experiences, and events— is developed over an individual’s lifetime. It also represents a cultural heritage passed down from previous generations. Therefore, while the cultural knowledge of The Storytellers is bound within the context of their personal life experiences and manifested within the pandemic, I cannot disregard the historical conditions under which the FCPs have developed this knowledge (Yin, 2003).

The unit of analysis of my nested multiple case study can be understood using Figure 1:

Figure 1

Nested Case Study of FCPs



Within the multiple case study approach, I used narratives to study the FCPs’ experiences as expressed in their own words through the interviews and community talk. This approach

emerged from a literary storytelling tradition and has been used in many social science disciplines (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Narrative researchers collect stories about individuals' lived experiences. Through stories, The Storyteller reveals insight about herself, her world, and how the narrative can be interpreted to provide an understanding of the life and culture that created it (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Patton, 2002). Accordingly, the interpretation of the transcripts will be critical to helping me understand how social and cultural meanings are deconstructed and reconstructed through my own lens, the perspectives of the FCPs, and within the larger social context (Farmer-Hinton, et al., 2013).

While I appreciate this narrative approach as described by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Patton (2002), I find it falls short in describing the fullness of the work I plan to conduct with the FCPs within my study. To more holistically study BWECEs and embody my sentiments around being a Black woman scholar studying sister Black women, I merged the narrative framework with my epistemological foundation of Black feminist thought to create endarkened feminist narrative (EFN).

Endarkened Feminist Narrative. EFN is a qualitative research approach which marries the praxis of narrative (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2016) with the sacred storytelling tradition and spiritual transmission that is foundational to Afrocentric cultural heritage (Collins, 2002; Dillard, 2010, 2016; Tillman, 2002). The practice of EFN, which recognizes research as a spiritual act, draws from Dillard's (2016) endarkened feminist epistemological (EFE) process of (re)membering (see Table 1), Yosso's (2005) description of cultural capital, and Tillman's (2002) description of culturally relevant research.

Table 1

Process of (Re)membering (Dillard, 2016).

(Re)searching	Involves seeking, looking, and searching for something about Black heritage and/or culture that will teach us something new. In this search, we are open to the possibility that we might be changed. Whatever we are searching for within Black identity and culture, we hope that it also helps us see ourselves more clearly—as teachers, as women, as humans.
(Re)visioning	Involves an expansion of our current understanding of Black people, culture, and knowledge beyond just what we can see (people, places, things) to engaging a world sense. This involves an awakening to what we hear, touch, feel, and intuit and the spiritual nature as the evidence of things unseen.
(Re)cognizing	Involves the work of changing our thinking about who Black people are, what Black people have accomplished, and the cultural and social brilliance of Black people. Recognizing also includes shifts in our heart or feelings.
(Re)presenting	Involves putting ourselves and our understandings of Black identities, notions of Black womanhood, and culture in the world in new and fuller ways. These acts of (re)presenting are a kind of truth-telling or a righting of historical wrongs.
(Re)claiming	Involves going back (and forward) to claim the legacy of Black and African people and to take our place within this legacy.

(Re)membering is a central component of the transformative and restorative nature I wish to embody in my work with the BWECs. Not only does it embody the reverence I believe is necessary for studying and illuminating the voice of Black women, it establishes a researcher disposition toward reflection and growth.

In addition to (re)membering, I draw on the forms of cultural capital as delineated in Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model (CCWM). She discusses: (a) *aspirational capital*, which allows Communities of Color to maintain hopes and dreams, even in the face of

barriers; (b) *linguistic capital*, which allows us to communicate in more than one language and/or style; (c) *familial capital*, the knowledge produced through kinship even outside of traditional views of “family”; (d) *social capital* or the networks of people and community resources which aid in navigating social systems; (e) *navigational capital*, the skills and knowledge to navigate systems of oppression; and finally, (f) *resistant capital*, our ability to persist against constant systemic inequality (Yosso, 2005). These forms of capital challenge white hegemony in greater society and within educational research by acknowledging and preferencing the skills that Communities of Color have developed in order to survive and thrive in social structures designed to keep them marginalized. By embracing Dillard’s (2016) ritualistic and transformative process of (re)membering while emphasizing the unique capital and ways of Blackness, I developed the framework for my endarkened feminist narrative approach.

In commitment to transformation and acknowledging the power of naming (hooks, 1995, 2008), within EFN, the “researcher” becomes the “inquirer”, and the “participant” is “The Storyteller.” I have chosen this nomenclature in recognition of the legacy of oppression that some outsider researchers have left within Communities of Color (Brandon, et al., 2005; Few, et al., 2003; Scharff, et al., 2010; Washington, 2006). In identifying as an “inquirer,” a relatively neutral term simply referring to one who asks for information, I distance myself from the oppressive and invasive practices of past investigators who have exploited Communities of Color through non-culturally relevant research. Even so, I acknowledge the privilege I gain from the women’s participation in the inquiry process. The education institution and credentialing process I engage in through my inquiry are inherently embedded in white supremacy. Therefore, like countless Scholars and Inquirers of Color before me, I resist the marginalization of our people while presenting their narratives for my own validation within the dominant institution.

The use of “The Storyteller,” rather than “participant,” pays homage to and invokes the essence of countless storytellers (sacred and familiar) within African and African Diasporic tradition who share narratives to disseminate and sustain Afrocentric culture (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Grace, et al., 2004; Majors, 2001, 2004). I capitalize the term to validate the women’s existence in opposition to the social invisibility and marginalization imposed on them through whiteness. Furthermore, it reifies The Storyteller’s authority over her own narrative and the agentic nature of remembering, recreating, and reclaiming the experiences of her journey.

The use of the endarkened feminist narrative approach within my multiple case study is essential for various reasons. The most evident rationale, however, can be summarized in three points:

1. Transmission of Cultural Knowledge: Research by Black women, with Black women, and for Black women is not only the sharing of narrative data as described by Creswell and Creswell (2017). It is a transmission of cultural knowledge and wisdom across generations and social and physical locations. As the two parties partake in the timeless cultural tradition of sharing stories and experiences, it allows Black women to cultivate meaning from an ever-shifting collective consciousness and, in turn, increase their collective cultural funds of knowledge (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Grace, et al., 2004)
2. Resistance of Silence (rather than silent resistance): In this moment of transmission of cultural knowledge, The Storyteller and the inquirer are acting in resistance to white hegemonic forces that work to silence and other Black cultural ways of knowing, being, and expressing (Collins, 2002, 2016a; Davis, 2018). By voicing their truth(s) the Black women resist notions of passivity or acquiescence in their unjust state. Instead, their

counternarratives expose and challenge inequitable power structures and stir dialogue toward social transformation.

3. Validation of Self and Expression: Through engaging in empathic dialogue with another Black woman, both the inquirer and The Storyteller reclaim their power in the validation of their narrative, experiences, and existence. In EFN, the women are given permission to reflect, deeply feel the fullness of their experience, and express the associated emotions passionately and unapologetically without threat of demeaning or dismissive labels (Davis, 2018).

My aim is to honor the traditions of Black narrative, linguistic patterns, dialects, and styles of expression while providing the reverence and methodological rigor merited by the stories shared between Black women. To actualize the intent of EFN, the inquirer must enter the process with an understanding of interdependency (Lorde, 2007) to deemphasize any differentiation of power (based on education, occupation, social class, etc.) between the inquirer and Storyteller.

Lorde (2007) explains that “Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, and the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters” (p. 111). As such, EFN requires the inquirer to enter the research process with intention and humility. In intention, the inquirer seeks a deeper understanding of not only the other woman, but of herself as a descendant of Black legacy. In humility, the inquirer holds the internal disposition of one who is others-minded and open to the expansion and/or adjustment of her current worldview of Black people, culture, and knowledge.

The summation of EFN as my research approach is displayed in Table 2, which demonstrates the adaptation of endarkened feminist epistemologies (Dillard, 2016) and the community cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005).

Table 2*Endarkened Feminist Narrative*

Endarkened Feminist Narrative (EFN)		Inspired By	
		Endarkened Feminist Epistemologies (EFE) <i>(Dillard, 2016)</i>	Community Cultural Wealth Model (CCWM) <i>(Yosso, 2005)</i>
How	<p>Intentional reflection, sacred, spiritual disposition in praxis</p> <p>Honoring Black linguistic capital such as African- American Vernacular English (AAVE) <i>(Majors, 2001, 2004)</i></p> <p>Humility in preferencing The Storyteller’s worldview, open to the transformation of one’s own worldview</p> <p>Understanding of interdependency between the inquirer & Storyteller.</p>	<p>Researching</p> <p>Revisioning</p>	<p>Linguistic Capital</p> <p>Aspirational Capital</p>
Who	Black women inquirers & scholars with Black women of various social locations across the diaspora.	Representing	Familial Capital
Why	<p>Seeking to illuminate counternarratives in the development of a more holistic view of social institutions, issues of power, & humanity.</p> <p>An act of empowering both for self & the collective.</p> <p>Developing <i>social capital</i>, to help Communities of Color share strategies of <i>resistance capital & navigational capital</i> to encourage & develop other Black women’s persistent against systemic inequalities.</p>	<p>Recognizing</p> <p>Reclaiming</p>	<p>Social Capital</p> <p>Navigational Capital</p> <p>Resistance Capital</p> <p>Aspirational Capital</p>

BFT demands the recognition of counter epistemologies and sources of knowledge. EFN addresses the need for a culturally relevant research model that helps unveil the unique knowledge and epistemologies of Black women. When performed with diligence and intentionality, EFN will cultivate a bond between the inquirer and The Storyteller(s) based on the tacit understanding of solidarity in the lived experiences of Black womanhood. The intent of this approach is to use language and expression as a vehicle of empowerment, for both one's self and the collective. As such, reflective and purposeful dialogue helps in the exchange of resistance and navigational strategies and encourages Black women's persistence against the onslaught of systemic inequities.

Narrative and Black Feminist Thought. My adaptation of endarkened feminist narrative (EFN) as a means to study the perspectives of BWECs is rooted in the African diasporic tradition of storytelling. The use of narrative and storytelling has emerged as the preferred genre of scholarship for Scholars of Color as the result of centuries of being classified in direct opposition to the dominant society (Amoah, 1997; Delgado, 1989). Through the empowered act of voicing their truth, women have the ability to regain power of their social narratives, shift the effects of social and political injustices, and dismantle unjust power structures which influence knowledge production (Davis, 2018).

Black feminist scholars, filmmakers, lawyers, and activists attest the benefits of narrative as an approach to illuminating Black experiences (Amoah, 1997; Machiorlatti, 2005; Madison, 1993). For example, within CRT and BFT, storytelling (specifically counter-storytelling) is championed as a means to provide a different voice and perspective other than what was created and maintain by white supremacist culture (Collins, 2002, 2010; Davis, 2018; Declair & Stephanic, 2004; Machiorlatti, 2005). Amorah (1997) stated that "Narrative is also the harbinger

of truth. Stories contain the truth of human experiences while law is little more than a legal fiction, a tale spun purely for the benefit of the dominant mainstream” (p. 87). Machiorlatti (2005) describes the Black feminist narrative style as one of “recollection and remembering so that stereotypes can be subverted, inaccurate historical representation corrected, and new aesthetic choices and forms emerge that diffuse dominant form” (p. 100). Black feminist narrative represents a way of centralizing the role of women as the “keepers” of cultural memories—where storytelling becomes a cultural metaphor and carrier of cultural meaning (Machiorlatti, 2005).

Other scholars have discussed the use of Black feminism as a methodological framework (Griffin, 2015; Patterson, et al., 2016). Yet, despite the shared understanding among Scholars and Philosophers of Color on the value of Black feminism and narratives, they lacked an approach for Black feminists made specifically for guiding the work of Black women scholars as they conduct narrative research and represent the voices of Black women across the diaspora. EFN, however, fulfils the need for a clearly stated method or approach on how to conduct narrative research based in Black feminism.

EFN takes the narrative process of storytelling as described by Creswell and Creswell (2017) a step further by embodying the ritual and sacred aspects of EFE (Dillard, 2016) and culturally relevant philosophy of CCWM (Yosso, 2005). In this process, Black women can use storytelling and narratives to draw wisdom and insight from previous generations of African diasporic women—a sacred and spiritual act.

The following sections will address the topic of how The Storytellers were selected and how their narratives were collected and analyzed. In alignment with CRT and BFT’s focus on counternarratives, I used research methods that are culturally congruent to Black heritage and

cultural experience (Tillman, 2002) and aligned with EFN. These methods include two individual interviews and a community talk, which were rigorously conducted to ensure trustworthiness and a holistic representation of BWECES' contributions to education and the greater community.

Participant Selection and Setting

The study setting has rich historical and socio-political characteristics which make a prime context for this exploration of Black women family childcare providers' cultural knowledge. The city is documented as one of the most racially segregated cities in the U.S. (Smeeding & Thornton, 2018). Furthermore, the state has been nationally recognized for having the most educational and economic disparities for Black and white children (Frey, 2018; Smeeding & Thornton, 2018). Forty-three percent of the city's Black children live in impoverished, racially segregated neighborhoods which perpetuate the racial segregation of the public schools and early childhood programs (Bonds, et al., 2009; Frankenberg, 2016). The various race-based, socio-economic disparities within the city were amplified within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic as the city's Black community suffered some of the highest contraction and mortality rates of the virus per capita (Graham & Brooks, 2020; Hess, 2020; Ray, 2020; Valentino-DeVries, et al., 2020).

Homogenous Sampling. In homogeneous sampling, all the participants in the sample are chosen because they share similar or identical traits (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This sampling strategy “focuses, reduces, simplifies, and facilitates group interviewing” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28). For this study, the homogenous sample was comprised of six state-licensed Black women family childcare providers, who primarily served Black children between the ages of birth and four years of age in the local urban community. Four of the six Storytellers also

reported serving school-aged children between the ages of four and twelve years. I started the recruitment process by focusing on the top four predominately Black populated zip codes. However, I also used opportunistic sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2016) to follow leads from colleagues in the field who knew Black women FCPs who fit the criteria of the study. I first chose Black women FCPs operating regulated, in-home family childcare programs because, as business owners, they have more autonomy and agency than a BWECE working within a center-based program. Black women FCPs choose whether or not they keep their businesses open. Contrastingly, in a center-based program, this decision comes from administration, a board of directors, or even external stakeholders. Second, because of their geographic and social locations, Black women FCPs are most likely to be rooted deeply within the communities they serve (Tuominen, 2003). While BWECEs employed in center-based programs commute to work, sometimes from outside of the community they serve, FCPs live and work from their home within the community. This makes FCPs more likely to embody the ownership and community mothering attributes described in chapter two.

Third, Black women have a long history of connecting and building systems of support within their communities (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013; Majors, 2001, 2004). Beginning in 1958, there have been various family childcare associations developed to support regulated FCPs (Gellert, et al., 1997; Lent, 2016). The state of study has a statewide, nonprofit organization for FCPs and their supporters. The city of study is part of a five-county regional family childcare association. Members of this regional association held a meeting in March 2020, among the first months of the pandemic shut-down, for FCPs to network and share information (Family Child Care Association, n.d.). While membership in one of these associations is not a requirement for participation in this study, it is likely the FCPs in this study have professional relationships with

other women in the community through these associations or other community-based networks. This may tend to their familiarity with networking and sharing navigational stories with other professionals in their field. Finally, regulated FCPs are easier to identify and access than non-regulated programs who would not be found in agency databases.

Sample Size. Various researchers have offered guidance on sample size in qualitative studies (Mason, 2010; Merriam, et al., 2001; Nascimento, et al., 2018). Though a range of one to 36 participants has been detailed by some researchers for use in qualitative studies (Njie & Asimiran, 2014), interviews designed to discern experiences and perspectives of homogenous groups have a suggested limit of six to 12 participants (Fugard & Potts, 2015; Guest, et al., 2006). Two to four participants have been recommended for a focus group (Fugard & Potts, 2015), and this range extends as high as eight to 12 participants (Baskarada, 2014). With these recommendations, the target sample size selected for the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews was set at six Storytellers, with a minimum of four (Baskarada, 2014; Fugard & Potts, 2015; Njie & Asimiran, 2014). The focus group size was limited to five Storytellers to preserve the sentiment of closeness within a sister talk, that may be compromised with more women in the group.

Recruiting. Geographic and social location are linked to race/ethnicity and socio-economic class. Specifically within family child care, providers tend to seek clientele who share a common racial-ethnic, cultural, and social class identity as their own (Tuominen, 2003). With this rationale, the FCPs for this study were chosen from a list of family childcare programs within local zip codes that are most heavily populated by Black or African Americans (over 70%). The four zip codes with the highest population of Black people rank as follows: zip code #1 (96.10%), zip code #2 (86.74%), zip code #3 (75.72%), and zip code #4 (70.36%) (ZipAtlas,

n.d.). Once these zip codes were identified, I accessed the local childcare quality rating website where one can search for providers by zip code. I narrowed my search to only include family childcare providers.

Once these FCPs were identified, I called one hundred family childcare programs within the four zip codes to calculate how many programs remained open during the “Safer at Home” order issued by the governor. As discussed in chapter two, the “Safer at Home” order requested all non-essential businesses to close and all non-essential workers to stay home to prevent the spread of COVID-19. However, all childcare programs serving health providers and other essential workers were requested to stay open as a critical service. The information from the one hundred recruitment calls was aggregated on a table (see Appendix B). The FCPs who indicated they were open for business were highlighted in green on the table. The FCPs who did not respond, did not return the voicemail within 24 hours, or indicated they were closed were marked in red. The data indicated that out of one hundred FCPs contacted, 33 programs remained open. These 33 centers were the initial sample from which I began to recruit Storytellers.

The recruitment process began with a U.S. postal mailing (see Appendix C) to the 33 FCPs who indicated they were open. The mailing included a brief description of my study and an explanation that participation was voluntary. The letters also contained my email and phone number for interested candidates to contact me for more information. After sending the mailing, I waited two weeks to hear back from the FCPs to express their interest in participating. During this period, one of the mailings was returned, reason unknown, and only one of the candidates called to participate. In addition to agreeing to participate herself, she asked if it would be helpful to connect me with a group of other FCPs she was associated with. While this lead seemed

promising, she did not answer or return any of the follow-up phone calls or emails over the next month.

Once two weeks passed after sending the initial mailing, I followed up with a personal phone call. Making the phone calls built a layer of rapport with the providers—putting a voice to the previous mailing. A number of the candidates noted they had received the mailing but did not respond. Others admitted it was probably lost in unread mail. Still others plainly stated they were uninterested in participating in my study. While making the phone calls, I noticed the interested candidates more readily agreed to complete an interview with me than a community talk. Some even asked to immediately schedule an interview session. Therefore, I gathered their email addresses and sent the consent forms with a re-introduction to myself and the study. It was a ten-day process to call, follow-up with, and confirm the participation of six Storyteller participants: LaToya, Anya, Sunni, Ms. Felicia, Ms. Sherice, and Ms. Tara.

Although the original intent was to conduct a community talk before the interviews, my commitment to being a culturally responsive inquirer through EFN lead me to adapt and conduct the interviews first. Additionally, the feedback I received in the initial phone calls made me unsure of how many candidates would be interested in participating in the community talk. Therefore, I adapted the first interview protocol to include the questions and themes I initially included in the community talk protocol. With this adjustment, I scheduled the first round of interviews with each participant Storyteller. All of the interviews were scheduled within one day's time to be completed over the next six days. Through the first round of interviews, we built a sense of rapport and foundation of trust; after which, I requested their participation in the focus group.

Gathering Individual Stories (Interviews)

Within this case study, the Storytellers' narratives were conducted virtually using two different methods: individual interviews and a community talk. My philosophical perspective, based in Black feminist thought (BFT), and my intent to emphasize Black women early childhood educators' (BWECEs) voices guided the inquiry and narrative gathering process (Hunter et al., 2002). Furthermore, my commitment to endarkened feminist narrative (EFN) helped me capture holistic, contextualized experiences by holding the cultural integrity of The Storytellers and community central throughout this study (Tillman, 2002).

Because individuals intertextually weave the personal, social, and the structural, I designed the protocols to solicit the nuances of The Storytellers' experience and perceptions to facilitate a richer analysis (Souto-Manning, 2014). I intended all the interviews to be completed virtually, via Zoom videoconferencing, to adhere to the social distancing regulations in place at the time of the study. However, Sunni's interview and each of the second interviews were conducted via phone to respect the convenience of The Storytellers, as the interview sessions took place while children were still present in their homes.

The interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes. However, even with the longer, adapted protocol, three of the six initial interviews took less than 40 minutes. The interview protocol was designed to provide a focused history of The Storytellers' lives (see Appendix F). I also wanted to learn their perceptions of their work with children and within the greater community, how they responded when faced with the "Safer at Home" order from the governor, what was taken into consideration when deciding to stay open, and what was their experience around maintaining a safe, healthy environment for themselves and the children. Finally, I asked The Storytellers about how they networked within their communities. At the end of each interview, I reminded The

Storytellers about scheduling the community talk to network with other Black women FCPs about serving children and families during the pandemic.

In addition to recording the sessions on Zoom, I used a handheld digital recorder as a backup recording device. I immediately sent the recording of our conversations to *TranscribeMe* transcription company to be transcribed. The transcriptions were all returned within 48 hours, which is when I listened to the recordings to review and edit the transcripts. I made sure the transcriptions not only reflected The Storytellers' actual words, but also their dialect. I edited out any grammatical changes that may have been made by the original transcriber and added punctuation to reflect the cadence of The Storytellers' words as I heard them in the recording. This review and edit process was conducted after each interview and the community talk.

After editing the transcripts, I emailed them to the respective Storyteller and invited her to meet with me to look over them and ensure they accurately reflected her words, perspectives and attitudes. This was a part of the member checking process (see Appendix K) (Carlson, 2010; Doyle, 2007). At this time, I also invited her to schedule a one-on-one, follow-up interview so I could ask clarifying questions that emerged during the analysis process.

Storyteller Biographies. The first interview was focused on understanding the motives, background experiences, and life stories of each Storyteller. Because I adapted the protocol to include questions originally intended for the community talk (see Appendix G), I also asked questions about how the women adapted to the conditions of the pandemic. Each of The Storytellers wove aspects of their unique backgrounds, worldviews, and understanding of their work in childcare throughout their narratives. In presenting the following biographies, I present The Storytellers' explanations of how and why they work within the care profession. Three of The Storytellers (Ms. Tara, Ms. Sherice, and Ms. Felicia) were my seniors and elders in the

community. Therefore, I include the title “Ms.” in front of their names to honor this aspect of their identities. Each Storytellers’ words were edited with deep intention to honor their unique voice, dialect, and flow, while clearly portraying their stories. The narratives are presented in the order in which I heard them.

LaToya. Latoya is a 38-year-old devout Christian Black woman who began working in the field when she was 18 years old. The fact that she has served in the field for over 20 years was at the center of her storytelling as she explained she was ready to shift career paths and “do something else.” LaToya was burned out—or at least in the process of recovering from it when we met for her first interview. She described the day she first realized she was suffering from the symptoms of burnout and compassion fatigue,

I remember one day over in the kitchen—the children were eating lunch, and I had just bust out crying. I was like, I can't do this no more. This is crazy because I give my 110% with the children and with the parents I try to help.

LaToya was beginning to notice that her passion for care work was changing in recent years as she became more sensitive to the noise of crying babies who, “cried all day nonstop.” She reflected, “I was 18 years old when I got into daycare, and I'm 38. I've never had another job and [...] I never worked anything else, and sometimes that baffles me.” With the feeling of “being stuck,” LaToya admitted, “I lost sight of the vision for a minute, and I think, I notice when I start to lose the sight of the vision, I start fading.” She explained, “I'm not in the headspace to lead, to give them my 110% that I give,” and said, “I don't want to [care for children] just because you're giving me \$2000 [a month].”

LaToya was adamant that “these kids are not dollar signs to me.” She wanted to run a “productive” program where children were engaged and learning. Yet, with the weight of

everyday responsibilities of caring for twelve children (infants to 12 years), administrating the business, and raising her own three teenage children, LaToya described the “break” that came from the pandemic as “Godsent.” She took two weeks of during the first month of the pandemic to rest and spend time with her biological children. The break not only gave her much-needed respite, but it helped her see that she wanted to stay in the field, but in a different capacity. LaToya said, “I want to do something else, but I do want to do something that's, I realized, in childcare like maybe being an instructor— maybe help somebody open up their own daycare, be a consultant with that.” Her time to reflect also brought the realization that she was pushing herself too hard and needed to make intentional decisions to incorporate self-care throughout her daily routine and “take them breaks.”

LaToya paused our conversation to “pray out” her program. She explained how every day, after all the children leave, she prays over her home and business. LaToya left the kitchen where she sat for our talk and retrieved her blessed oil. As she held the phone, with me on the other end, she paced around her program thanking God for the children He allowed her to care for. Walking through the dramatic play area, LaToya prayed for the families of her program and asked for their “divine protection” over the weekend. While pacing over to the art center, she adamantly bound any unclean spirits that may have entered the program throughout the course of the day. Finally, in the center of the room, LaToya bowed her head to rededicate her home and business to the Lord. She ended her prayer by asking God to bless me in my work and thanking Him for crossing our paths. We shared a brief moment of silence before she opened her eyes and thanked me for praying with her. Instead, I thanked her for allowing me to partake in such a powerful moment. In that moment, my spirit was the closest it had been to another woman in a very long time. I was overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude and stillness.

Sunni. Sunni is a thirty-one-year-old single mother. As a New York born Dominican woman, she recalled how strange it was to come from the diversity of New York to our segregated city.

I just remember I was born in New York, an' coming from New York to [our city], it was so different as far as diversity and different races and things like that. I got here when I was 11...10, and the transition was so different. You didn't really see a lot of Spanish-speaking kids. When I told people I was Dominican, they're like, "What is that?" Because they just thought it was Mexican or Puerto Rican—nothing in between.

Sunni went on to explain that a major childhood memory was growing up in our city's segregated public schools, where she stood out as a Spanish-speaking Black girl. Missing the diversity of New York schools where "you see every flag", Sunni determined she would "bring something different to the northside for early childhood" by sharing her home culture with her new, predominantly Black neighborhood.

Sunni was first introduced to child care as a profession when she was in high school. Through her "best friend's sister." She reminisced, "[childcare] was my job after school, and then I started to have a liking for it— which, I always had a passion for kids." Although she worked other jobs (such as an in-home health care provider), Sunni decided to take the classes needed to become a licensed childcare provider, since she noticed her career path "kept going back into childcare." After having her daughter, Sunni "didn't want to send her to daycare;" so, she decided to open her "own place." Sunni's daughter was two years old at the time of the interview. Sunni found that having a bilingual childcare program was a perfect way to teach her daughter Spanish and support their family through her passion. Sunni explained that she adjusts her language to the developmental age of each child.

The baby babies, I'll talk to them a little more Spanish. But then, the two or three-year-olds, I will translate [for]. Whatever words they know, I would switch in Spanish, so they won't get too confused—It is working because they pick up a lot of things.

Anya. Anya is a 35-year-old mother of a 10-year-old girl. She established her childcare program February 28th, 2019. She was first introduced to childcare when she was 16 and worked at her cousin's program while on break from her studies at a state university. Although she studied business management, Anya explained she initially wanted to go to school for cosmetology. However, since the only school offering that program was a technical college (not a university) she “was basically pushed to go to a school.” Her parents raised her to “get a job with a good company [that] has great benefits, then [to] stay with them.”

After Anya explored a number of career paths (including data entry, health care, a correctional officer, and a hospital worker) she knew she wanted to be her own boss. Anya said, I've been all over [in my career choices], but my heart was always wanting to help children. I just knew I want it to be my own boss. At first, [my choice] wasn't even daycare, it was a group home.

After struggling for some time trying to establish a group home for troubled girls, Anya asked herself, "What do I have the education and the knowledge to do right now and can run successfully on my own?" Answering this question is what ultimately led her to become a family childcare provider.

As her own boss, Anya works up to 14 hours a day, caring for up to 19 children between the ages of two-weeks and 13 years. She runs every aspect of her childcare program by herself including the transportation services. In addition to maintaining her bustling childcare business,

Anya cares for her own daughter and elderly parents. She said, “It’s a lot. But I am the type of person when I have a lot to do, it kind of makes my days go by faster. So, I appreciate it.”

Ms. Sherice. Although I did not recognize her name when I made the initial recruitment call, once she pulled down her mask to reveal her face, my heart melted as I saw her distinct, aged but familiar features. Ms. Sherice worked with my grandmother when she first transitioned from family childcare to a center-based program. I remembered Ms. Sherice from the pictures my mother showed me of my third birthday party at my grandmother’s old center. Sitting with Ms. Sherice was like talking to a long-lost aunt as she reminisced of growing up with my mother and aunt in the old neighborhood. She told me of how she worked different jobs with my aunt and about the time my mother first came home from Bible college to introduce the family to the man who would become my father.

Ms. Sherice also told me of how my grandmother helped her when she decided to open her own family childcare program.

When I did decide to do it, your grandmother, Miss Margaret, she was always such a wonderful lady in my life. She was like, “Just let know when you start.” I still have my mats that she gave me. She let me come in and get a few items that I needed [...] I love Miss Margaret. Even after I left the company, I still kept in touch with her as much as possible. She was just a wonderful lady.

I felt my face growing warm with emotion as I listened to this old family friend talk about the kindness my grandmother showed her and so many others—small acts woven into the memory of her legacy.

Now, at the age of 57, Ms. Sherice had been in childcare for over 38 years. She stared at me directly as she told me how she is “old school” in the way she commands the respect of

the parents and children in her program. She said, “if they're not going to make their kids obey, they're not gonna run over my house and just— you know what I'm saying?” The pause in her speech was punctuated with the quintessential “I ain’t playing with you” look that Black mommas give as a sort of final warning to children who are acting up. Even seeing Ms. Sherice give me that look through the computer screen, I felt myself straighten in my desk chair and respond, “Yes, ma’am” to her “You know what I'm saying?”

Ms. Sherice explained that she was preparing the children for the “real world.” She was concerned with the parenting skills she noticed in the young mothers and fathers of her program.

It seems like nowadays people are raising their kids different from 10 years ago— five years ago. You know, the structures. [...] I've been in the business for 30 plus years, and it's just totally different. A lot of parents don't make their kids accountable for just simple things that they could be doing—using their manners, speaking to people in the proper way, using language or just— community-wise.

Although it was unmistakable that Ms. Sherice meant business, it was even more evident that she deeply cared for the children and their families. In both interview conversations, Ms. Sherice spoke in detail about how she makes sure the children and their families are well fed. She said, “If they need something, if I'm able to help, I will [...] If anybody come in my house, I'll feed them.” She took pride in describing the meals she prepared, “Like today, they had spaghetti, a salad, corn on the cob and a banana. [...] Yesterday, they had roast, corn on the cob, grapes and bread. I cook, you know what I'm saying? And see, today I made a lasagna.”

Ms. Sherice expressed that the reason she does so much for the children and families is because,

I enjoy it... I really do enjoy it. I love the parents, even though sometimes they can be a handful. I enjoyed the kids, of course. I enjoy what I'm doing—you have to. If I didn't, I sure wouldn't be doing it because it ain't enough money.

Ms. Felicia. Ms. Felicia is a 48-year-old Black woman with Irish and Indigenous heritage. Although she has no children of her own, she has spent her life caring for and raising other people's children. She said,

My whole life was just all about kids. I'm the oldest granddaughter. All of my cousins are under me, so I helped in raising [them]. That was my first job, as a babysitter. That's kinda all I ever known was taking care of people's kids. Even as I got older and had my own place, family members who either strayed from drugs or alcohol, I took them in and took care of them like they were my own. [...] That's all I've ever known, is just taking care of other people's kids. I don't have my own [children], so it made it even easier, and I love doing it.

Ms. Felicia's professional childcare journey got off to a rocky start in 1997 when she opened her first program in her one-bedroom apartment. She explained that, "Back then, it was just a letter from five people that was notarized, saying that they knew me and knew that I loved and care for the kids." However, instead, Ms. Felicia worked 17 years for a popular digital service company and continued her role as an othermother for extended family members and whomever she saw needed help. She said, "My house was always open to other people [...] It was always somebody and their baby, or their babies."

Ms. Felicia originally wanted to open a group center to help young mothers, but she realized childcare was another way for her to follow her passion of helping mothers and their children. Finally, she decided "it's time." A year before this study began, Ms. Felicia quit her

career at the telecommunications company and settled in our local city. She “took a step of faith” and determinedly completed all the required classes to open her own family childcare program.

Ms. Felicia has now been serving the local community through her program for almost a year. She continued her education through gaining a series of college level credentials that prepared her to be a childcare administrator. Empowered with the knowledge and skills from the courses, Ms. Felicia determined, "I got to go further." At the time of our interview, she was looking for a new home and a building in which to establish her group childcare center, thus expanding her capacity to serve more children and families.

Ms. Tara. Ms. Tara was the first and only Storyteller to respond to my original mailing to say she wanted to participate in my study. However, I sent two emails and left two phone messages to Ms. Tara over a 5-week period of time, with no response. After completing the first round of interviews and scheduling the initial community talk, I felt an inclination to reach out to her once more. This time when I called, she sent back an automated text, “I can’t talk right now.” I took this as an invitation to text her, reintroduced myself to her, and asked if she was still interested in sharing her perspective with me.

My conversation with Ms. Tara was like talking to my mom. Instead of using Zoom, we completed the interview via FaceTime on our iPhones, which added to the sense of familiarity I felt with her. In addition, having joked with her via text earlier that day almost made me forget that this was an interview rather than just a conversation with someone who could have easily been my mom’s friend.

Ms. Tara is a 53-year-old Black woman who has run her own family childcare program for over 17 years. She started as a foster care parent and had two daughters of her own between two marriages. After seeing a job ad for a program coordinator position at a local charter school,

she applied and was hired. However, “When [the university] funds went low, they ended up taking my job and combining it with another job. So pretty much I was given the pink slip.” Losing her job at the charter school helped Ms. Tara decide to open her own family childcare. Although she had the expertise to run a center-based program, she chose family childcare because she “wanted something quiet and didn't want something really big.”

Ms. Tara ultimately entered the field because she lost her job in the charter school. Yet, she revealed there was a more personal reason she was inspired to serve through care work.

Another reason I decided to start was because when I was the trust accountant at US Bank, I sent my daughter to daycare briefly. She only went for about two or three months. She was a premie. She was two and a half months early; so, when she attended daycare, she was only like five and a half pounds. She was about three months at that time. She was real small, maybe seven pounds.

Ms. Tara explained, a friend referred her to the FCP, who she tried for about a month. However, the arrangement failed due to a number of situations that made Ms. Tara uncomfortable, “[The provider] had the boyfriend over walking around any kind of way and putting my baby and other kids in [her] bed.” After a disagreement with her daughter’s provider, Ms. Tara took the baby to her aunt who provided kincare and had already helped raise a number of children in the family. The negative experience with the FCP inspired Ms. Tara to establish a childcare program that she could run according to her own standards of care and education.

My disposition while gathering the stories of each of The Storytellers, was guided by my commitment to endarkened feminist narrative (EFN) and Black feminist thought. I found myself humbled that they took the time to share their perspectives with me, and I was amazed at all they carried in their various circles of influence. The Storytellers were not only successful

businesswomen, they were friends, daughters, leaders in various community organizations, and some were mothers of their own children. These various circles formed layers of their unique identities and added intersectional dimensions to their narratives. To keep record of their background demographics, I designed the following table:

Table 3

Storyteller Demographics

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Years in ECE</i>	<i>Years as Program Owner</i>	<i>Formal Edu</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Number/Age of Biological Children</i>
<i>LaToya</i>	38	Black	20	7	Some College	Unmarried	3 (14,16, 18yrs)
<i>Sunni</i>	31	Dominican Black	~2	2	Some College	Unmarried	1 (2 yrs)
<i>Anya</i>	35	Black	~3	1.5	Some College	Unmarried	1 (10 yrs)
<i>Ms.Sherice</i>	57	Black	38	20	Some College	Divorced	None
<i>Ms.Felicia</i>	47	Black w/ Native & Irish Heritage	~2	1	Some College	Divorced	None
<i>Ms.Tara</i>	53	Black	17	17	Some College	Divorced	2 (22 & 21 yrs)

Community Talk (Focus Group)

The focus group, which was called a *community talk* for the purpose of this study, took place after the first round of interviews. The protocol (see Appendix I) was designed to foster a sister-to-sister dialogue around The Storytellers’ roles in supporting essential workers throughout the pandemic and how/if they developed networks of support with other FCPs and community stakeholders toward protecting their businesses. “Sister-to-sister” is an Afrocentric colloquialism

used to describe congenial conversations in which life lessons may be shared between Black women (Few, et al., 2003).

A community talk was a natural choice for the first stage of this study for three reasons: (a) there is a long cultural tradition in Black women's sisterhood of sharing narratives within safe spaces that are created for us and by us; (b) the expression of Black women's unique and powerful voices within a collaborative setting is empowering and self-affirming; and (c) uncovering women's daily experiences through collective stories and resistance narratives can lead to self and social transformation, which aligns directly with my EFN framework.

Cultural Tradition and Sisterhood. The use of a community talk honors the rich cultural history of the way Black women intrinsically communicate, develop interpersonal relationships, and share experiences of oppression and resilience. "The act of using one's voice requires a listener and thus establishes a connection. For African American women the listener most able to pierce the invisibility created by Black women's objectification is another Black woman" (Collins, 2002, p. 104). In essence, there is understanding and validation of self when Black women share their stories with other empathic Black women. The shared understanding of life as a Black woman is the foundation of the tacit bonds of Black sisterhood—a supportive feeling of loyalty and attachment to other women stemming from a shared feeling of oppression—and has deep roots in Black women's culture (Collins, 1989).

Unique and Powerful Voices. The context of Black women's homes and communities have become sites where women can share and validate their experiences of individual and collective resistance and survival (Collins, 2002; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). "This connected voice affirms the humanity, specialness, and right to exist and define one's self" that empowers Black women against the backdrop of invisibility and social repression experienced in

our daily lives (Collins, 2002, p. 102). Although Black women often lack power at the institutional level, we exercise individual power through speech and other acts of resistance and self-protection as a way to survive. By recognizing the catalytic quality of communication, we talk back to external hostilities as a way to resist domination, redefine oppressions, and transform society (Davis, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Resistance Narratives Toward Social Transformation. Women of Color have deep roots in the tradition of gathering to share their experiences and work toward social transformation. Black American churchwomen and educators gathered to organize political work in the South to advance their people after the emancipation (Anderson, 1988; Collins, 2016b). Later, at the turn of the 20th century, “book clubs” became sites for women’s intellectual nourishment and political work. Chinese women in the San Francisco garment industry held focus group discussions to organize against their exploitative work conditions (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). Furthermore, Black and Latina women have gathered in their kitchens and at family gatherings to share *chisme* or gossip bits and work through life together (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013).

With this rich cultural history, group interviews are particularly effective in uncovering women’s daily experience through collective storytelling and resistance narratives. Our stories are woven with cultural symbols, words, signs, and ideological representations that reflect the dimensions of power and domination that frame our daily experiences. By employing a community talk to develop a connection between The Storytellers, I created a space where we could share our experiences, reflect, and explore complex ideas, motivations, and behaviors through each other’s perspectives and experiences.

My concern, however, was with the nature of conducting a community talk on a virtual platform. My intent was to facilitate a sister-to-sister conversation among women who did not already know one another. This endeavor requires connection, atmosphere, and intention. Yet, online conversations with numerous participants can sometimes be awkward as it becomes harder to read body language, in-time facial expressions, and other nonverbal cues important to fostering the natural back-and-forth characteristic of Black women's dialogue. Fortunately, each of my participants indicated that they had experience with and were comfortable with the Zoom videoconferencing format. Additionally, each Storyteller was given my personal contact information in case there was any trouble connecting to the session.

Three of the six Storytellers participated in the community talk: Ms. Sherice, LaToya, and Ms. Felicia. At the time, LaToya was driving home from the funeral of a dear friend; so, she logged on about 20 minutes into the conversation. In the meantime, Ms. Sherice and Ms. Felicia talked about everything from the recent happenings in their lives, the children of their program, virtual learners, and plans for the future. This all took place before I even presented the first question prompt. The transcriptions of community talk sessions were used to inform the protocols of the subsequent interviews.

Narrative Analysis

The work of analyzing the case study was a deeply emotional, spiritual, and critical process. The rigor was based on my understanding that narratives I received were The Storytellers' individual perceptions of life during an extraordinary era in world history. I realized that while their stories were based on specific parts of their life experience, my work as the inquirer was to capture the whole story (Webster & Mertova, 2007). With each round of

storytelling, the narratives became more holistic— filling in gaps and clarifying their positionality.

Table 4

Summary of Storyteller Participation

<i>NAME</i>	<i>INTERVIEW #1</i>	<i>COMMUNITY TALK</i>	<i>INTERVIEW #2</i>
<i>LATOYA</i>	X	X	X
<i>SUNNI</i>	X		
<i>ANYA</i>	X		X
<i>MS. SHERICE</i>	X	X	X
<i>MS. FELICIA</i>	X	X	
<i>MS. TARA</i>	X		

To answer the first research question of how one could describe the cultural knowledge of the FCPs as they reacted and organized to support young learners and their families, I started with an inductive analysis. With this inductive method, I focused on the patterns that emerged in the narratives. I used colored-pencils and highlighters to note different themes and topics that appeared often within and between the accounts as they emerged in the transcripts. By anecdotally considering the regularity of topics that were discussed and noting the predominate color patterns that developed through my coding technique, I determined critical themes in The Storytellers’ understanding of themselves, their work, their communities, and the world.

The interviews with each Storyteller were transcribed within 48 hours of the session. After receiving the finished transcripts, I reviewed each by listening to the recordings to edit the transcripts and prepare them for member checking (Carlson, 2010; Doyle, 2007). This first step was critical because it helped me refamiliarize myself with the stories and start identifying themes or initial codes. After editing the transcripts, I reread each story while simultaneously

listening to the recording to connect with the energy, voice, intonations, and character of The Storyteller. In this first reading, I wanted to gain a holistic view of the narrative.

Inductive research works from the “bottom-up, using the participants’ views to build broader themes and generate a theory interconnecting the themes” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 23). My purpose in using the inductive approach was to (a) synthesize each The Storyteller’s background information within the accompanying stories; (b) highlight significant ideas and the frequency of their occurrence in the transcripts; (c) document how experiences and perceptions were mentioned in the transcripts; and (d) document my initial interpretations. With these intentions, in the third reading, I read without the recording. Instead, I went line-by-line and marked key words and patterns with different colored pencils and highlighters, which lead to an initial coding of the text. I focused specifically on noting categories, commonalities, and relationships within the stories (Maxwell & Miller, 2008). In addition to color-coding key words and topics, I took notes in the margins of the page, identifying questions I wanted to address in subsequent interviews and/or the community talk (Maxwell & Miller, 2008). To answer the question of what types of capital The Storytellers engaged, I used a deductive analysis. I aligned this analysis with the forms of capital described by Yosso (2005) and identified ways The Storytellers resisted, navigated, and aspired throughout their experiences.

From this analysis, I created a table on my office whiteboard to organize my preliminary interpretations of the data. These interpretations included the ways The Storytellers described their cultural backgrounds, perceptions of the pandemic experience, and the capitals they used to adapt to changes made by the government and other regulatory agencies. During this process, I prayed for divine wisdom, discernment, and clarity of thought before beginning each reading. I immersed myself in the transcripts focusing on one Storyteller at a time. My intention was not

only to answer the research questions as a critical inquirer, but to connect to the women's narratives on an emotional and spiritual level.

I performed numerous readings of the transcripts both with the audio as well as with the text only. I also listened to each recording before going to sleep to internalize the narratives and allow my subconscious to uncover messages and connections I may have overlooked during the day when my mind was more crowded. I kept a notebook and pen on the nightstand by my bed so I could quickly document the product of these nighttime ruminations. I focused specifically on making sense of the micro (personal) and the macro (social or institutional) situations The Storytellers conveyed through their narratives (Souto-Manning, 2014).

From these first steps I began the categorizing and coding process. I sorted the color-coded notes and quotes I had from the transcripts based on similarities and patterns I found in The Storytellers' descriptions, perceptions, and sentiments (Maxwell & Miller, 2008). The categories, generated from coding the first interviews, helped me formulate the questions to guide the community talk and the subsequent interviews.

After completing the community talk, I followed a similar analysis process. Much of the almost two-hour conversation was unguided by the questions I prepared (see Appendix I). Therefore, in my analysis, I was interested in noting what topics developed naturally from the ebbs and flows of the discussion. This information was both deductively categorized based on the codes developed from the initial interviews and inductively coded, as many of the topics that emerged were not discussed in previous conversations. Within this process, I began linking different categories into larger patterns which I used to compare within and between the individual Storytellers' cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Rigor and Trustworthiness

I believe the work of studying and illuminating the voices of Black women is a sacred and worthy work that deserves rigor and reverence. This call to rigor is especially important given the tradition of misrepresentation, misappropriation, and/or the misconstruing of Black women's experiences in historical literature (Few, et al., 2003; Tillman, 2002). As the inquirer of this study, my personal background, culture, and experiences held potential for shaping the interpretations I ascribed to the data (Creswell & Poth, 2016). As such, I acknowledge the weight of my experiential knowledge and my role as insider researcher (Merriam et al., 2001), which I carried into my work with the BWECEs of my study.

Insider research typically refers to research conducted by and with individuals who share a common salient sociopolitical identity. "It has commonly been assumed that being an insider means easy access, the ability to ask more meaningful questions and read non-verbal cues, and most importantly, be able to project a more truthful, authentic understanding of the culture under study" (Merriam et al., 2001, p.411). Those who advocate insider research often argue that such techniques as racial matching lead to more accurate findings in which research participants will be more honest and forthcoming with researchers, with whom they share a common identity (Mohan & Venzant Chambers, 2010)

Balancing this perspective, Hodkinson (2005) warns researchers against failing to recognize that "one's precise level of proximity is liable to fluctuate somewhat from one respondent to the next" (p.139), as "the prominence of particular elements of identity fluctuates back and forth according to context and audience" (p.133). This became evident in my study as I connected differently with some Storytellers based on their age, prior relationship, and language skills. Thus, even as a self-identified sister Black woman early childhood educator, my level of

connection with The Storytellers fluctuated and was renegotiated as we navigated differences in age, socioeconomic status, educational background, and other experiences (Mohan & Venzant Chambers, 2010).

To check my assumptions, add to the trustworthiness of my findings, and avoid the misinterpretation or misrepresentation of The Storytellers' narratives, I adapted the questions outlined in Milner (2007) to keep at the forefront throughout the interpretation, coding, and analysis of the transcript data.

Table 5

Data Analysis Integrity Questions

What are The Storytellers' cultural and racial heritage and what are the historical implications? How do I know?

How do The Storytellers' racial and cultural backgrounds influence how they experience the world? Am I projecting my own thought onto their experience or is my work an accurate representation of the BWECs experiences? How do I know?

What do The Storytellers believe about race and culture in society and education, and how do they and I attend to the tensions inherent in my and their convictions and beliefs about race and culture in the research process? Why? How do I know?

What are the historical and current social, political, and contextual realities that have shaped The Storytellers' racial and cultural ways of knowing? How consistent or inconsistent are these realities with my own? How do I know?

How do I negotiate and balance my own research interests with those of The Storytellers, which may be inconsistent with or diverge from mine? How do I know?

In referring to these questions as I created and reviewed my reflective notes and conducted my data analysis, I allowed my findings to emerge inductively from the data, rather than by imposing my own interpretations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Additionally, member

checking was an important step in ensuring the accuracy of my interpretations. This member checking process will be explained in the following section.

Credibility and Validity

The use of rich questions to elicit stories and deeper narratives to illustrate The Storytellers' experiences, beliefs, and practices was the first step in ensuring this study's credibility and validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Within the interview sessions and community talk, this approach built a descriptive, detailed presentation of each Storyteller and their viewpoints (Merriam, et al., 2001). In the analysis and presentation of the data, I used thick and colorful descriptions of the context, so that readers and other scholars can make judgements about the degree of similarity that can be made when trying to apply the findings elsewhere (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Eisner, 2017).

The data was triangulated through various data collection methods (a community talk and two interviews) to gather a robust body of data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Alternating between the interviews and the community talk helped establish rapport and provide details on The Storytellers' lived experiences and their perspective of the pandemic. Ultimately, the methodology provided space for The Storytellers to reflect on the ways they adapted to overcome the multifaceted effects of the health, economic, and social conditions before and during the pandemic.

To ensure my interpretation of The Storytellers' narratives were reflective of their lived experiences, I performed member checks (Carlson, 2010; Doyle, 2007). After the transcripts from the individual interviews were collected, I sent each Storyteller the edited transcripts (via email) to offer them the opportunity to review what they said and how it was represented (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To guide the process, I provided a member

checking protocol with questions to aid in The Storytellers' review of the data (see Appendix K). The Storytellers were asked to respond with any concerns or amendments within ten days of receipt, and no response was considered permission to proceed with the analysis process with the data as is. Moreover, since research should be a "negotiated process" (Doyle, 2007, p. 889) of meaning-making between the inquirer and participant Storytellers, I conducted the member checking with The Storytellers in their second interviews. I reviewed the transcripts and asked clarifying questions to capture the nuance in their narratives as they expanded on their original thoughts. This concept of "participative member checking" (Doyle, 2007, p. 908) aligns with my commitment to portraying an accurate depiction of The Storytellers' lived experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, I documented the steps of my data collection and analysis in an audit trail (see Appendix L) (Carcary, 2009). I employed this tool as a reflective methodology to document my actions as a critical inquirer and demonstrate the intention and care put into my investigation (Carcary, 2009).

Limitations

Despite the rigor towards ensuring the trustworthiness and credibility of this exploration, there remain some limitations inherent to case studies. Within case studies, what is learned through narratives and transferred to similar situations is in the eye of the reader (Stake, 2005). In this process, researchers pass along some of their "personal meanings of events and relationships—and fail to pass along others" (Stake, 2005, p. 455). In my study, the more voluble Storytellers spoke in depth about certain experiences and perspectives they had, which could not all be recorded in one dissertation. Therefore, I had to make intentional decisions on the amount of description, analysis, and discussion I included in my writing (Stake, 2005). This was an especially sensitive task considering my commitment to a holistic and appropriate

representation of the nuance of each Storyteller's experiences. I navigated this decision-making by focusing on the data most relevant to answering my research questions about The Storytellers' cultural knowledge and forms of capital.

A similar concern is that the reader will "add and subtract, invent and shape—reconstructing the knowledge in ways that leave it...more likely to be personally useful" (Stake, 2005, p. 455). I understand the findings will be most relevant to readers who connect to the particulars of the case under similar circumstances. Therefore, my responsibility as a research inquirer is to provide thick detail of holistic narratives, while avoiding generalizations and producing hard conclusions. Instead, I presented findings supported by the data evident in The Storytellers' narratives (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Lastly, as detailed in Table 4, only two of The Storytellers opted to participate in both interviews and the community talk, and two Storytellers opted only to participate in the first interview. While I adapted the first interview protocol to include all the questions I was interested in, the fact that two of The Storytellers did not complete the member checking nor were able to answer any clarifying questions means there are details to their narratives, relevant to this study, that may not be included in the transcripts.

Conclusion

This completion of this study is a step toward gaining a deeper understanding of the unique and significant contributions of Black women family childcare providers as caregivers, educators, and essential workers. Our very souls need to honor the wisdom of Black women's ways of knowing and being in inquiry (Dillard, 2016). However, this only happens with intentional and culturally relevant inquiry into Black women's cultural ways of being,

professional knowledge, and pedagogical practice. I developed the endarkened feminist narrative approach to address the need for a culturally relevant research model that helps unveil these epistemologies and unique knowledges of Black women. Through EFN, the transmission of cultural knowledge and empathetic dialogue around BWECES' experiences empowered both the individual Storytellers and the collective group of women towards developing their social capital, resistance capital, and navigational capital within the field of early childhood education.

Chapter 4: Findings

The stories the women told illustrated the everyday lives of Black women family childcare providers (FCPs). They determinately continued their work of community mothering even as long-standing social infrastructures were shaken around them in the aftermath of a worldwide health crisis. As an inquirer, I was given insight into the ways The Storytellers shifted their lives with grace and innovation to uphold their own corner of the Black community. As I write this chapter, we remain in midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. This work portrays the voices, experiences, and perspectives of the family childcare providers during the uncertainty of present conditions. The first part of the chapter describes the women's cultural knowledge as it manifested while they responded to the ever-shifting conditions of serving children and families during the summer of 2020. The second part of the chapter describes the forms of capital the women employed as essential workers to support themselves, their business, and the young learners.

Through the lens of endarkened feminist narrative (EFN) and the examination of the individual accounts, certain understandings became clearer. First, the women's cultural knowledge manifested in various ways. 1) They depended on their faith in God to sustain them through the health risk and financial uncertainty of serving through the pandemic. 2) The

Storytellers possess what I describe as a “boss mentality.” They recognized their personal responsibility to protect and sustain themselves, their families, their business, and their communities before, throughout, and after the pandemic. 3) The women acted as conduits of knowledge— educating themselves, the children, and the next generation of educators. 4) The Storytellers’ roles in ensuring the advancement of their community went far beyond the walls of their childcare businesses. Finally, in answering the question of what forms of capital the women employed, the narratives show evidence of navigational capital, aspirational capital, and social capital.

Within this multiple case study, each Storyteller’s account represents her own experiences and perspectives, yet contributes to the collective voice of Black women early childhood educators serving within the study’s city of context during the pandemic. I am using the individual voices of the FCPs to better understand the collective voice of BWECs, while acknowledging the uniqueness of their experiences within and between the cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The “Natural Stuff”: Cultural Knowledge in Action

Throughout the study, there were certain understandings and dispositions that felt fundamental to The Storytellers’ behaviors and worldview. On various occasions when I asked the women to describe or further explain these elements, I observed they would consistently pause to think. Upon reflection, I realized the characteristics I asked them to explain were intrinsic parts of their identity and most likely something they had not articulated before. These intuitive ways of thinking and understanding the world, their lives, and their work with children are what I recognized as aspects of their cultural knowledge—the “natural stuff” (coined by one

of The Storytellers). This natural stuff was composed of their most fundamental understandings or predispositions that were inextricably linked to The Storytellers' core identity.

For example, during the study's community talk, one of The Storytellers, Ms. Felicia, shared a time she went to help her niece at her center-based childcare program. Although, at the time, Ms. Felicia was not working as a professional care provider, the visiting librarian at the center was impressed with the way Ms. Felicia interacted with a group of toddlers to capture their attention. Ms. Felicia recalled how the librarian asked, "Who's the lady downstairs with the kids? I've never seen the toddlers light up like that." However, Ms. Felicia explained to the other Storytellers in our community talk, "I was just down there being [Felicia]." She continued to explain that after seeing Ms. Felicia with the children, her niece asked her to prolong her visit so Ms. Felicia could train the other teachers. "So, I stuck around, and I went in and I just trained their teachers. It was just based on what I knew from the [licensing] book— what we got to do— and just natural stuff."

When I asked Ms. Felicia where her "natural stuff" comes from and how it was acquired, she paused. Then she reminded me,

I've talked to you before about [me] being the first granddaughter, and I had years on the next group. So, I think before [my] cousins came along, I probably was already at 10 and 11 [years old]. I babysat everybody, and then it became, back then, \$5 jobs and \$10 jobs. Then, just growing up I always had the friends who had babies early. And so, I was just— you gave me that name [the community mother]. I love it. The community mother— and that's really what it was. I was french-braiding everybody's hair on the block [laughter]. And then babysitting these kids. When I moved to [this city], I took on my cousin's children. When they got older, one I sent off to the Navy [and] one to

college. And then the next group, I got the girls. They're really still around. I got them at seven and eight years old and raised them, and the youngest one is now 21. They are still real close with me. All I ever known growing up was how to care for somebody and just being there for them— it rolled into this.

Ms. Felicia continued to explain how the only thing she ever wanted to do was work with young children. She told our community talk group that although she had other choices and skills she could employ, caring for children and their mothers is the only thing that makes her “satisfied and content.” Ms. Felicia recalled how she always “loved playing house” as a child. She would say, “No, I’m the momma” or “I’m the teacher,” because even as a child, she just knew she belonged in that role.

To me, Ms. Felicia’s comments represented the natural inclination she had towards caring for children. In their individual accounts, each of The Storytellers described that working with community children and helping people was their passion. Child care was so inherent that some Storytellers (Ms. Sherice and LaToya) said it was all they knew to do. Others, like Sunni and Anya, described how even though they tried different careers, they always returned to child care. I understood this inclination to care for others as the “natural stuff”— a manifestation of their cultural knowledge. This natural stuff was a constant in the women’s lives, even when they learned about the pandemic.

Like generations of Black women before them, The Storytellers knew their role was to adapt to meet the needs of the children and families in their community. In 2020, this meant adapting to parents’ irregular work schedules, modifying program routines, and supporting virtual learners while still nurturing infants and toddlers. The women managed this workload all while protecting themselves, the children, and the parents from exposure to the virus. Although

there were various changes the women made to their daily routines, at the core of their actions was the understanding that their role in their community is to care and serve, regardless of societal conditions. It was within this resolve that the women's cultural knowledge and navigational strategies rose to the forefront. In responding to the tumultuous sociopolitical, health, and economic conditions of the spring and summer of 2020, The Storytellers focused on four foundational elements: their faith in God, their responsibility to protect themselves and their families, their role in educating the next generation, and going beyond child care to uplift their communities.

“God, It's in Your Hands”: Deep Spirituality and Faith in God

Five of the six women, whom I will refer to as The Storytellers throughout this work, professed their Christian faith without prompting. Their spirituality was a binding element throughout the individual interviews and in the community talk. Although there was much uncertainty in their work and daily lives as a result of the pandemic, The Storytellers' faith and spirituality grounded and sustained them throughout. For example, Ms. Felicia explained that when she first began her career in childcare, she did not want to return to our local city, yet she followed “the lead and guide of God.” Even as she described her various life experiences—going through a divorce and working 17 years at a job that was not her passion— Ms. Felicia said, “Everything is still going the way God intended for it to go, and that's what I'm doing.” When she first learned about the pandemic, Ms. Felicia found peace in knowing, "God, it's in your hands. Whatever happened, you brought me here. I know you're not finna just leave me in this place where I have to be worried."

Ms. Tara was also deeply rooted in her faith and spirituality. She explained that before the pandemic, she was very active in the local church and even brought the children from her

program to church to participate in the kids' choir where she directs over 50 children in worship.

She stated,

As far as the community, I do a lot in my church. I do vacation Bible school and church picnics. A lot of the children that are in my daycare, I bring them to church with me.

Some of them are in my choir, my kids' choir. Some of them I take to vacation Bible school. I bring them too when we go to the Bay Beach or State Fair—I always like the families to come with us that are not attending churches. And they will.

Also, when explaining why she undercharges for her childcare services, Ms. Tara said, “it's pretty much a ministry for me. It's not about the money, because I'm blessed.” She acknowledged God when explaining there have been no accidents or medical problems in her program for over five years. She stated, “praise God, I haven't had any medicine to give out, no accidents. So, there's nothing in [my medical books] for five years.”

Similarly, Ms. Sherice gives God credit for bringing children and families to her center because she has a reputation for being a woman of faith. She turned my attention to two girls in the program who were sleeping behind her during the interview. She explained,

They are sisters and they're new because [the mother] was with a center before family daycare. I think they was in a big environment before they came to me, and so she decided she wanted to put them in a family daycare. She pulled me up [online] and the Lord worked it out where she came here. We had a good conversation; we was on the same page. She wanted somebody that had good faith and [was] clean. She came [and enrolled the girls] the same day.

Ms. Sherice explained that in preparing the children of her program for the world, “I’m trying to do it by the Bible, by my upbringing, by the Word of God to try to instill that balance in them.”

For example, she said,

[The children] need to be thankful and give God all the praise. Even at this age, they still can do it. They can put their hands— my baby, she can't even talk. But she knows when she sit up in that high chair, she puts her hands together and thank the Lord, even though she's not speaking it. But she knows that's our routine. Then [when] they leave here, I'd be praying that what I give them, they keep it. You know what I'm saying? As they get older, they'll remember to be thankful.

Generations of children had graduated from Ms. Sherice’s care. Yet, she would often see their parents around the community. The parents would tell her that although the kids have been out of her program for years, they still bless their food even when not prompted— “They still know to be thankful.” Eventually, when the pandemic came, Ms. Sherice credited God for giving her the foresight to prepare herself financially with regards to her bills and credit cards. She said, “God put it in my spirit to [take care of my bills]— you know how He just sets you up to think?”

Affirming the significance of spirituality in The Storytellers’ lives and work, LaToya spoke of how routinely expresses her faith through prayer. By consistently modeling prayer and trust in God, she deepens her relationship with the children in her care.

I want to give [the children] all of me. They seen me have a owie and, they're really concerned about me. We do prayer here—we have a Christian-based childcare. They’ve seen me cry out to God; so they know what to do. We all here, and we are all praying.

While the subject of their prayers depends on what is relevant that day, LaToya makes sure that talking to God is part of the children’s daily routine. She went on to say, “That's what I do love

about family [childcare] here, this intimacy— where you kind of get to love your clients and the children.”

It was LaToya’s faith that sustained her through the loss of her friend and “spiritual mother” who was murdered by a family member during the course of this study. While driving home from the funeral, she called in to participate in the study’s community talk. Answering the question of where The Storytellers received strength and support during these trying times, LaToya responded,

For me, my strength, she died. She was my strength. But I know—my strength’s in God too. He keeps me every day. I get up. I do prayer. I keep going. But sometimes I feel like I don't want to do this no more.

LaToya was hurting deeply with the loss of her friend, “my mentor and my best friend— my mom.” LaToya’s grief connected her to Ms. Sherice who was mourning the loss her friend to COVID.

Sharing her feelings of deep sadness, Ms. Sherice explained that the “girlfriend” she lost was a pillar of support in her life for over 33 years. Her friend gave her financial advice that guided her to begin saving for retirement. She was also the one person Ms. Sherice could trust to watch her children when she had to run errands, “she would come over so I could do something in the day, like run to the store or take care of some business. But now, I have nobody.”

During the community talk, Ms. Sherice grew quiet as she remembered that, like LaToya, she had lost a great source of strength, support, and light. Ms. Sherice recalled how she and her girlfriend would often imagine what it would be like to retire someday and travel together. However now, with no husband or biological children, she went through daily life coping with the weight of her loneliness. As the other Storytellers engaged in conversation through our

videoconference, tears began to flow, and Ms. Sherice reached for a napkin to wipe her swelling, wet eyes. In a moment, it was quiet. Our spiritual connection transcended all space and physical barriers so our hearts could be present in grief with Ms. Sherice. No words could embody the sentiment of that moment. Through faith, we connected to Ms. Sherice to offer support, strength, and love. As we collectively bowed our heads and reached our hands toward the screen, LaToya's voice poured fervently through the speakers as she cried out to God,

Dear Heavenly Father, we just thank you for this day. We thank you right now for each and every one that's on this line. I just pray that you touch our dear sister, Ms. [Sherice]. Build her up right now. Lord God, you know the situation. Lord God, her heart is heavy. We ask that you just touch her, Lord God, even touch her in the midnight hour, Lord God. Lord, put your arms around her. She needs you, Father. So Lord, we just thank you for who you are and what you're about to do. And we thank you for the victory that you will provide, Lord God, and you will give her the strength to keep going.

In that moment, we became more than a circle of Black women early childcare providers networking on a virtual call. We were sisters— near, present, and united.

“You're Not Going to Sit Here and Intimidate Me”: Boss Mentality

In addition to the deep spirituality woven throughout The Storytellers' narratives, I observed that the women took significant pride in being their own bosses. This “boss mentality” was illustrated in the way The Storytellers emphasized their value of being the authority within their programs and working with autonomy and agency. This value system was exemplified by four of the six Storytellers as they shared their appreciation of being able to create their own schedules, practices, and businesses policies. Anya stated that one of the main reasons she entered the childcare business was because she wanted to be her own boss. She said, “Though

my career has been all over; ultimately my heart was always wanting to help children. I just knew I wanted to be my own boss.” Similarly, when I asked what she enjoys most about being a family childcare provider, Ms. Tara said, “Well, in all honesty, I like being my own boss.” LaToya also mentioned she loved the “the flexibility of it [...] Especially if I’m having a woman’s day... I got my sink in there. I can go in there and wash up. Do me.”

Being one’s own boss and having a sense of autonomy was a recurring theme in The Storytellers’ discussion of their professional lives (i.e., their interactions with the children, parents, and regulatory agencies). Their diverse skills as autonomous businesswomen and care providers brought The Storytellers a sense of pride and ownership. For example, in the community talk, LaToya told the group, “What am I going to do when I leave [the childcare field]? I don’t know nothing else,” Felicia firmly responded, “You do. You know a lot of stuff. If nothing else—You know how to be a boss.” This statement exemplifies the value the women placed on their ability to manage every aspect of their businesses, while maintaining their family-lives, household duties, and community obligations.

Still, this “boss mentality” went deeper than being a source of pride. It was ingrained into The Storytellers’ identities and cultural knowledge. This was evident in the take-charge attitude they displayed when the pandemic arrived. Despite the uncertain and ever-changing conditions of the pandemic, the women understood it was their sole responsibility to sustain and protect themselves, their families, their business, and the families of their program.

“We Cannot Afford to Get Sick”: Protecting Themselves. As bosses and the heads of their households, each Storyteller made a series of decisions and took action to protect themselves, their families, and their businesses at the onset of the pandemic. Three of the six Storytellers initially closed their programs to assess the situation and determine an appropriate

course of action: Ms. Felicia, LaToya, and Ms. Tara. The other three Storytellers adjusted their program routines and practices while continuing operations: Anya, Ms. Sherice, and Sunni.

Sunni, who remained open throughout the pandemic, decided to send her young daughter to stay at her mother's house to distance her from the other children, who may have been exposed to the virus. In the meantime, Sunni protected herself by strengthening her immune system. She said, "I'm taking my vitamins, and I wore a mask and gloves at one point."

Anya, who has a 10-year-old-daughter, immediately contacted the parents of her program to inform them that although she would keep the program open, she had some conditions. She texted them saying, "Hey, in order for me to continue to serve you guys and stay open, I need everybody to just work together and try to stay as protected as possible." She explained that since many of the parents in her program were essential workers, she asked them to, "be careful and mindful when you're coming home to your kids." Even with these precautions, Anya described the mental pressure of knowing the risk of exposing her elderly parents to the virus because of her decision to continue serving the children and families.

I have lost loved ones from this [virus] and it's really scary. The fact that it's still here is even more scarier because here we are, almost six months in, and then they're saying numbers [of COVID deaths] are still high in a lot of places. All you can do is really try to stay as sanitized as possible and pray about it. It's scary because having a daycare and after I get finished, I go see my elderly parents. I can go fight [the virus] off, but they might not be able to fight it off like I can. So, it is really scary.

Anya's concern illustrates the real-life danger The Storytellers understood could be the consequences of their choices as the authorities in their program. Although it was their choice to

remain in the business throughout the pandemic, the women knew it was ultimately their responsibility to protect themselves, their own families, and now the families of their program. Accordingly, Anya increased the sanitation routine within her program “by cleaning the carpet once a week, making sure that no one shares blankets, washing their blankets” and sanitizing everything at the end of each shift, including the program van which she uses to transport the children. She said, “I’ve just been trying to stay up on it like that, and if I do see any kind of sickness with any kids— [I have] the parents take them in or get them checked out.”

Of all The Storytellers, Ms. Sherice seemingly made the fewest changes to her program, because she was already constantly cleaning and sanitizing, even before the pandemic. She said, “When I worked in Roberson[’s daycare], back in the day, I [was] always cleaning. Naptime, I got my bucket out and start wiping down. You know what I’m saying? And I do that here. I’m constantly doing something.” Ms. Sherice also explained how she wears a mask when she is in close proximity to the children’s faces or when the parents pick up and drop off.

While Ms. Sherice said she was less concerned about her own health and more for the parents and children, Ms. Tara, on the other hand, was highly aware of the risk in her decision to reopen the doors of her program. At 53 years of age with a pre-existing medical condition, she was considered at high risk to contract and die from COVID-19. Ms. Tara explained,

I had a stroke when I was 47, a mild stroke; so, I was definitely high risk. [And] my daughter has asthma, the young one that works with me. I told [the parents], "We are very high risk. We cannot afford to get sick. I may be one of those that don't make it out the hospital."

As COVID-19 is a respiratory disease, Ms. Tara’s daughter with asthma was especially vulnerable. As such, Ms. Tara used her agency to discern the best plan of action to protect

herself, her daughter, and her business. Ms. Tara closed her program for a week to perform a deep cleaning and thorough disinfecting. She explained,

I got rid of teddy bears and anything that I felt the children could spread germs with. I got rid of those toys and kept pretty much [only] the plastic toys. I talked to the parents, and I told them that I will not be doing any transportation.

She went on to describe how she communicated to the parents about the high risk she was taking with her own health in order to stay open and care for them. She candidly asked them, "Do you want me to die? [laughter]. Do you want Miss [Tara] not to be your provider, because she's going to be gone? No. It'll be your fault. Do you want it to be your fault? No."

Although she was laughing as she told me how she conveyed her concern to the parents, it was apparent Ms. Tara's fear of contracting the virus was very real as she described her response when a three-year-old in her program sneezed directly into her face without covering his mouth and nose. She said, "Luckily, I had on my mask [but] I was so angry. I wanted to scrub my eyes [with] Lysol. [...] Oh, I had a fit. He was only three, but still, I don't care—[laughing] don't you spit on me!"

The fear and uncertainty as the women worked to protect themselves, their families, and their households from the virus was expressed by the other Storytellers in various ways. Ms. Felicia explained that to protect herself and her home at the onset of the pandemic, she closed her program for two weeks. During this period, she quarantined herself in her home and hired a family from her program who owned a professional cleaning business. Ms. Felicia explained that when she learned the family got licensed specifically for COVID-19 disinfecting, she "had them to come over and disinfect everything and talk to me about ways to stay clean in the center outside of my OCD ways."

In addition to hiring professionals to disinfect her home and program, Ms. Felicia turned down her extended family members who wanted to come visit after flying in from out-of-town. She also bought a sewing machine and made masks for herself, her extended family, and the children and families of her program. As illustrated, each of The Storytellers in their boss mentality assessed the conditions of the pandemic and implemented a plan to protect themselves and their families.

“You Don't Work, You Don't Eat”: Protecting the Business. Another way The Storytellers demonstrated their boss mentalities was in their rationale of staying open during the pandemic. Despite the substantial health risk, uncertainty, and desire to protect themselves and their families, three of the six Storytellers conveyed that they decided to remain open because they wanted to serve their families. Sunni stated, “[My decision to stay open] really was just for the parents. I knew I have parents that don't really have like a big support system. So, it's me [staying open] or they're just not going to be able to go to work.”

Anya similarly showed that she valued serving her families by stating, “I didn't want to close unless I had to. I mean, I know that the state, at one time, was still allowing the pay. But my thing was, I knew my families still needed me.” Ms. Sherice also affirmed, “I just stayed open because I had two parents that still had to work. Where will their kids go? They probably would lose their job.” It was clear The Storytellers knew that the parents, as essential workers, heavily depended on their care providers to be able to work. However, in addition to staying open to attend to the parents' childcare needs, there was a secondary concern that became more evident through a closer look at The Storytellers' experiences. It became evident The Storytellers were concerned that if they closed, they would risk losing the families of their program.

Sustaining Financial Stability. In being successful businesswomen and their own bosses, The Storytellers knew they would risk losing their family clientele if they chose to close their programs during the pandemic. This concern was expressed in three of The Storyteller's narratives. Anya, who previously said she stayed open to serve the parents, added,

Although the state is still allowing that pay, you're taking the risk of losing families. Because even though you're closing your doors for personal reasons, they [the parents] can't choose to stay home—especially when you have ten parents that are essential workers. So, it's different if they weren't [essential] and they had the option [to work from home], but they didn't.

Similarly, LaToya, who initially closed for a mental break, reopened her program earlier than she wanted because she felt pressure to accommodate the parents in her program. She said,

I really just closed for the break— for a mental break. I done had enough money where I could stay closed for two months. But people were still calling me— asking me, "Hey, would you open? When you going to open? When you going to open? When you going to open?" I was feeling pressure to open back up because I didn't want to lose 'em, but I had to really step out on faith.

Finally, Ms. Tara said,

Because I'm considered high-risk, because of some medical issues, I was a little scared. I was a little skeptical about opening up the daycare. I'm going to be honest, [I was] real skeptical because a lot of my friends that own daycares, they are closed down. But they have husbands and income n stuff, so reality settles in that you don't work, you don't eat. So, I still had to get paid.

Ms. Tara's understanding that the provider who doesn't work, doesn't eat, seemed to resonate across the narratives. She realized that as the boss, the future of her business and financial future laid squarely on her shoulders. Notably, all of The Storytellers in this study were unmarried. Ms. Sherice, Ms. Felicia, and Ms. Tara were all divorced. LaToya and Sunni were single; while only Anya had a boyfriend. As bosses who were the heads of their households, The Storytellers understood that the income they earned through their childcare businesses was all they had to pay their bills and sustain their families. This was affirmed when Mrs. Sherice described her many financial obligations,

You still got to pay the bills. I always end up [paying] on taxes every year. I usually take my credit cards to pay off my taxes because I don't want that bill on me, and then I still got to take care of other things. So, it's like, you got to live. [laughter] It's just me. I ain't got no husband or nobody I can call and say, "Can I get a few dollars?"

Similarly, LaToya told me that when she heard of the pandemic and how schools and other businesses were closing down, her first concern was not the health risk. Instead, her first thoughts were of how she and her family would be financially affected. She said, "[I] thought about [the pandemic] just financially because this is my only source of income. Sometimes it's hard to put up— especially when you just kind of by yourself. I'm a single mom."

With these remarks, it was evident that choosing to close and risk losing family clientele would present a significant threat to The Storytellers' future financial well-being. The women understood the governmental aid was only a temporary solution, and at the end of the day, loyal families are what keep the business running. Family loyalty was especially important because The Storytellers did not earn much as family childcare providers. Although not every Storyteller discussed what their financial situation was before the pandemic, Ms. Sherice told me frankly

that she worked “paycheck to paycheck.” She went on to explain how the tax and social security system for self-employed childcare workers is not designed in their favor. She said,

I've never paid myself. If I had to pay myself, I will be in a different bracket because that's being considered an employee. So, they'll put me on a different bracket for taxes. It's expensive. Put it like that. It's expensive, and I'm just trying to balance what I'm doing now. So, I didn't want to put myself in that bracket.

Ms. Sherice also explained that even though she pays an accounting company to set aside her taxes and social security, it is nearly impossible to save for her retirement since she has to pay her own overhead, taxes, insurances, and social security, without receiving an actual paycheck from her business. This sobering reality was reiterated by Ms. Tara who also explained that she does not get paid for her work. She said,

It's pretty much in what you work— or you don't get anything. Like for myself, I don't have a paycheck for myself. I'm not employed through myself—for myself. I pay my employee's quarterly taxes and all that. Because if I do [pay myself], my accountant's going to charge me another \$200 to do that, and it's going to be a whole different [tax bracket].

She went on to explain the decisions she made as a boss to ensure her employee's income during the pandemic. Ms. Tara cared for the children by herself to make sure her employee could utilize the government's unemployment insurance, which was provided specifically for individuals who were laid-off during the pandemic. She reflected,

It's just hard. For a couple months, I worked by myself because attendance was low, because a lot of my parents are laid-off. So, my employee was able to get that extra \$600 [of unemployment insurance]. I thought it would be best for her to do that instead of me

struggling, trying to pay [her] when I don't have it. I couldn't [apply for governmental aid], because I wouldn't had got paid. I haven't had any income. They wouldn't have been able to check my wages as part of the workforce.

The Storytellers' accounts reiterated the fact that childcare is one of the lowest paying professions even though their services are essential to supporting the working-class economy. Their narratives also illustrated how The Storytellers were bosses and savvy businesswomen who understood how to navigate the tax system and secure the loyalty of their clientele to ensure the financial stability of their businesses and households.

Tension and Distrust of Regulatory Agencies. While The Storytellers understood that the families were the core of their business, as bosses and businessowners, four of the six discussed different times when they had to dismiss certain families from the program for not following their policies. As the authorities in their programs The Storytellers set and enforced various policies to protect themselves and maintain the operations of their businesses. However, The Storytellers shared various times when the state's Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the local quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) undermined The Storytellers' authority in their programs. In response, the women activated their boss mentality to enforce their policies and protect their businesses.

As state-licensed childcare providers, The Storytellers were subject to the state's licensing rules and regulations which were enforced by the Department of Children and Families (DCF). While DCF has various functions, childcare providers have most contact with the licensers who provide continual oversight of the programs through unannounced inspections to ensure all licensing requirements are met to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the children. While the licensers complete routine visits, they are also required to inspect programs

that receive complaints from parents or other stakeholders. Inspections often result in the providers being penalized if they are not in compliance with every aspect of the licensing rules and regulations. Penalties for minor infractions can result in a “write-up,” while more severe violations can result in a revocation of the providers’ operating license.

Also under the auspice of DCF is the state’s childcare rating and improvement system (QRIS), established in 2010. The function of the QRIS is to standardize and measure childcare quality and support the providers by offering the tools and training to deliver high-quality early care and education. Although the licensing regulations and QRIS policies are both under DCF, they are separate entities and enforce different policies (Turner, 2018).

During the pandemic, DCF offered resources to help essential workers, providers, and families navigate the changing childcare landscape. These resources included information on how to promote the health and well-being of children and the ECE workforce; additional texting services, emails, and phone calls to connect and inform families and providers, and emergency childcare centers in schools, YMCAs, and other community organizations to meet the increased demand for child care for essential workers. Additionally, the state implemented a Child Care Counts: COVID-19 Supplementary Payment Program which distributed loans to providers to “help counter troubling trends persisting in the aftermath of the public health emergency” (Child Care Counts, 2020, n.p.). These funds were provided under the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act, 2020).

Five of the six Storytellers utilized these funds to pay bills and program operating costs, offset their income loss due to the decrease in enrollment, and make some overdue improvements to their homes and physical environments. However, even though DCF distributed various grants, loans, and financial support to sustain the network of state-licensed childcare

providers, there remained an undertone of distrust and tension in four of the six Storyteller's narratives as they described their previous encounters with the DCF agency. For some of The Storytellers, these experiences impacted the way they initially perceived the local government's financial aid during the pandemic. For example, Ms. Sherice talked about how other providers jumped at the government subsidies thinking, "Oh, there's free money out there." However, she warned them that there was no such thing as free money. She told them, "It don't really work that way" and was wary of what future repercussions might come of using the funds. Similarly, Ms. Felicia said that although other providers encouraged her to apply for the funds, "I just didn't apply because I didn't want to touch anything that I didn't understand."

The previous interactions with the local regulatory agencies seemed to threaten the sense of authority, autonomy, and agency that The Storytellers deeply valued in their work. When asked if they felt supported by DCF and other agencies during the pandemic, three the six Storytellers (Sunni, Anya, and Ms. Felicia) responded positively and listed increased communication (through emails and the licensers) as well as the monetary aid as reasons they felt supported. However, four of the six Storytellers expressed distrust of and tension with the agencies as they described the various times they had to reassert themselves as the boss and final authority of their own businesses.

Ms. Tara, LaToya, and Ms. Felicia shared stories where they felt DCF challenged their authority as independent businessowners and tried to intimidate or exert more power in their programs than the agency had. For example, Ms. Tara spoke of how DCF continually assigns her different licensers with whom she has had varying levels of success in building rapport or a relationship of trust. As such, when I first asked about the support she felt from DCF during the pandemic, she paused then answered saying,

I— think they're doing what they can. I'm happy that the licenser hasn't been bugging us. I know that. [laughter] I used to get it [an unannounced compliance visit] once a year usually. I don't like the fact that they switch licensers so much. I just hear my licenser's switched again. I mean, it's ridiculous. You can't build a rapport with someone if every time you turn around [they're getting switched]— because the licensers all look for different things.

The constant switching of licensers and the inconsistent nature of the oversight visits hindered Ms. Tara from building a sense of rapport or trust with the agency or its representatives. She recalled a specific licenser she encountered through the years. She felt he tried to intimidate her in her own program. She said, “Yeah, he was a jerk but he was okay.” Ms. Tara went on to explain that some of her contacts in the local childcare network gave her insight on how to deal with the licenser's abrasive personality. They told her, "you know, all you have to do with him is tell corny stories and laugh." Mr. Tara explained how she used her humor to brush off the licenser as he tried to intimidate her within her own home and program. She said, “At first, he came in there... he tried to intimidate me. He came in and he's like— [She deepened her voice to imitate a white male's voice] He said, “I'm your licenser.” So, I'm laughing... I was like “You're my licenser?” Hello!?” [laughter].”

Ms. Tara and I shared a deep laugh as she imitated the white man walking through her program “like he was King Tut.” She told him, "Boy, you die and breathe just like I do. Okay? You're don't scare me cause you writing that paper... you better have good reason [to write me up], cause I will call your supervisor." Ms. Tara explained that she distrusts the DCF licensers because, "I know [they] finna write me up on something else, cause [they] are going to find something if there's a gnat on the wall; so I'm okay with that."

Ms. Tara recalled that she warned the white male licenser of how she called the supervisor on a different licenser. That licenser not only cited Ms. Tara for a series of trivial violations (i.e., dust on the ceiling fan, plastic on the paper towels under the sink, and burnt popcorn in the microwave), but attacked the Christian business practices that Ms. Tara implemented in her program. She described this other licenser as a young, Black, Muslim woman, who told her it “wasn't acceptable” that Ms. Tara lead the children in prayer before meals. Even after Ms. Tara showed the licenser her program’s policies where it explains that she runs a Christian center and therefore prays with the children, the licenser insisted, "Well, I don't think you should be doing that. That's not appropriate." After this, Ms. Tara explained how the Muslim licenser spitefully wrote five pages of punitive violations. However, knowing her rights as a businessowner, Ms. Tara, called the supervisor and told them, “licensers are in place to help us, not to tear us down.” Within the month after Ms. Tara’s call, she was assigned a new licenser.

Ms. Tara seemed pleased as she concluded her story explaining how she told the white male licenser, “When I don't agree with a licenser, I make sure they never come to me again.” She chuckled, “After I told him that, he became real nice to me.” These licensers, as representatives of the DCF agency, failed to establish any rapport with Ms. Tara and negatively impacted her perception of the agency. Moreover, their perceived lack of respect for her business, home, and spirituality diminished any sense of trust Ms. Tara had for them. In sum, the licensers challenged Ms. Tara’s position as the authority and autonomous owner of her program.

Through the lens of endarkened feminist narrative, Ms. Tara’s story illustrates how she used a variety of navigational and resistant strategies as well as her social network to negotiate her relationships with the DCF licensers. Not only did Ms. Tara connect with a friend who worked in another local childcare agency, she connected with a woman from church who worked

in the governor's office. These members of her network helped Ms. Tara understand that the white male licenser responded to "corny stories" and humor. In the case of the Muslim licenser, Ms. Tara explained that her contacts informed her the licenser's stepmother was also a supervisor in DCF. Therefore, Ms. Tara knew who not to call in order to get a favorable outcome for her complaint. Additionally, by appealing to the DCF supervisors, Ms. Tara displayed resistance and navigational capital. Her actions clearly demonstrate she had the skills and knowledge to navigate DCF's organizational infrastructure to persist against the systemic injustice she felt targeted her program.

Similar to Ms. Tara, when I asked LaToya if she felt supported by DCF during the pandemic, she quickly retorted, "No, I never looked for support from them anyways as far as the agencies." LaToya explained that over her years of being self-employed, she felt that DCF was "prejudice" and that "they like to cause confusion." She said, "They tell the providers one thing. They tell the parents one thing. So then when you [as a provider] say something to the parents, they're like, "What? [but] DCF said [something different]."

LaToya gave the example of a time she called DCF to request help in returning a payment to a mother, who LaToya felt had disrespected her and her program. Consequently, LaToya decided she did not want to serve the family. However, when LaToya called DCF, instead of supporting her decision not to enroll the family, she said DCF asked, "Well, what are *you* doing?" and, "How can you make it work where [the family] can stay?" LaToya emphasized, "I don't want them to make it work." To add to her frustration, DCF sent her the paperwork for an overpayment rather than a return of payment—exacerbating the situation even more.

The feeling of being consistently undermined by the agency made LaToya's relationship with DCF tense and full of distrust. She said they made her feel as if she did not own her own

facility. However, in the community talk, she asserted, “This [childcare program] is our business. So no, you [DCF] don't run our business.” LaToya concluded that if the state DCF truly wanted to support her, they would need to support her in enforcing the policies she set for her business. She complained, “Everybody's got they own rules. [QRIS] got they rules, you [the provider] have your rules, and then the state [licensers] have they rules.” In essence, the varying rules and regulations implemented by the various local childcare agencies brought confusion and challenged the authority and policies LaToya established within her program.

Ms. Felicia also described how she had to advocate for authority, autonomy, and agency within her business. Ms. Felicia previously expressed she felt extremely supported by DCF during the pandemic. However, she shared a story about the first time she was “written up” by a DCF licensor who she described as “a pistol.” Ms. Felicia explained that when the licensor came into her program, she would identify the different areas in Ms. Felicia’s practice that needed to be changed. However, since Ms. Felicia had been working closely with a QRIS representative to prepare her program for accreditation, the areas marked for demerits by the licensor were actually changes dictated by the QRIS. Like LaToya, who asserted that DCF liked to “cause confusion,” Ms. Felicia recognized the two agencies had different sets of standards which were simultaneously being imposed upon her program. Ms. Felicia asked the licensor, "So these are things that my [QRIS] consultant helped me with and said it was okay; so, is this [change] your preference or is this in the [licensing] book?" Ms. Felicia wondered, why the QRIS consultant would spend so much time helping her make program adjustments if the DCF licensor was “going to come in and just wipe out everything that she said."

For Ms. Felicia, this and other experiences she discussed represented a huge infringement on her sense of agency and autonomy within her program. While The Storytellers agreed that

they appreciated being their own bosses, external agencies that imposed varying rules and regulations opposed the authority and agency of The Storytellers as independent businessowners. This “confusion” and discontinuity between and within the various entities of DCF threatened The Storytellers’ sense of clarity and autonomy in their business practices, challenged their boss mentality, and opposed The Storytellers’ position as the ultimate authority in their programs. While five of the six Storytellers eventually applied for and received DCF’s financial assistance during the pandemic, their feelings of distrust of the agency, founded in past experiences, may have impacted their perception of the aid. This sense of distrust, in turn, made them initially hesitant to apply for the funds.

As illustrated in the previous sections, The Storytellers’ boss mentality manifested in the way they exerted their authority within their programs while determining to remain open for essential parents. They assessed the conditions of the pandemic, their health, and their programs before deciding how to protect themselves and their families. The Storytellers also exercised their autonomy in adapting their businesses to serve essential parents and keep them loyal to their program, as well as when deciding which families to let go. Finally, as bosses and businessowners, The Storytellers advocated for themselves and their programs despite the confusion caused by contradictory policies and regulations applied by the state DCF and QRIS.

***“I’m Very Particular About Education”*: Educating the Next Generation**

Another theme that emerged while exploring The Storytellers’ cultural knowledge and ways of being was that they acted as conduits of knowledge. The forms knowledge acquisition The Storytellers discussed throughout their narratives included: college courses in the field, business and financial management courses, trainings they took to fulfill continuing education hours, networking with other providers to learn of resources, and self-lead research for their own

empowerment. For example, The Storytellers sought professional knowledge by studying the state's licensing rules and regulations to be able to advocate for themselves when confronted by intimidating regulating agencies such as the local QRIS and state DCF. However, not only did they place high value on their own professional knowledge, The Storytellers were adamant about passing their knowledge to the next generation.

Ms. Felicia shared how she used the skills and knowledge gained from a recent childcare administrator's credential she took at state university to improve her program. When describing the courses to the other Storytellers in the community talk, she explained, "I really do get to use what I'm learning right into my program, like this is what we're doing now." She was able to use the content of the class to improve her current family childcare business and move closer to becoming an accredited program. Furthermore, the finance and administration courses empowered her with the knowledge to move toward opening her center-based childcare program in the near future. Eager to continue developing herself, Ms. Felicia finished the coursework for the administrator's credential in the beginning of the pandemic and immediately enrolled in another credential to learn how to better engage and educate the infants and toddlers of her program. Ms. Felicia was excited that the information she was gaining helped her improve her daily routines with the children and train a new teacher she hired.

Ms. Felicia explained that after so many years of care work, the natural next step was to begin training other aspiring educators. She modeled this philosophy as she worked to train her new employee. Although it had only been a few weeks, Ms. Felicia described how she already saw such potential in the young woman's work with the children. Ms. Felicia said, "She has everything, but she doesn't [have confidence]. I will be sitting here [in my office] some days, and I'll just hear how she'll pick up a song and start singing it to the kids." Although the young

woman has the “natural stuff” needed to engage the children, Ms. Felicia realized her responsibility to empower the young teacher to feel comfortable in following her natural inclinations. To develop this young teacher’s confidence, Ms. Felicia described how she consciously allowed the young woman more autonomy within the program saying, “You’ve got this. You don't have to ask me everything.”

Ms. Felicia’s philosophy of mentoring and empowering the next generation of educators was revealed not only in her practices with the young teacher in her program, but in a comment she made to LaToya during the community talk. After, LaToya explained that after 20 years of being in the field, she was feeling burned out and looking for work in other fields, Ms. Felicia shook her head and said, "Wow. You in training mode." Ms. Felicia encouraged LaToya explaining that after 20 years in the profession, LaToya undoubtedly had a wealth of skills and experiential knowledge to offer the next generation of educators.

Ms. Felicia’s comments were confirmation to LaToya who was already looking for ways to expand herself and begin training others. LaToya later explained to me how Ms. Felicia’s words resonated deeply within her. LaToya reminded herself, “You *are* a veteran in the field. You need to go and share your education, your experience, [and] your energy with the next generation *now*.” When I asked what specific knowledge she would like to pass to the next generation of young educators, LaToya said she would encourage them to keep up with their education. She wanted to teach young providers,

That book, that childcare book is like a Bible. Knowing your rights as a provider is very important because your licenser can say [any]thing. What you need to know is there's no one outside [of] the rules. You need to know your rights for your own self. If you don't

know your rights, [regulatory agencies] can pull anything over you. Don't be scared to speak up for yourself to them.

LaToya was passionate about encouraging young FCPs to educate themselves so they could advocate for themselves and their businesses. She said, "I really want to train to get people prepared for the [QRIS] and the licensing." She recognized that many of the younger providers she talked to were "scared" when regulatory agencies came into their businesses. LaToya asked them, "What are you scared of? They're people, too." She went on to explain how she recognized that "Bad habits get worse, and good habits get better." For this, she tells young educators that if they educate themselves, do things "by the book," and develop good habits, "you're just going to flow."

Finally, LaToya explained how this commitment to education and quality child care is what separates the "babysitters" from quality childcare centers. She said, in mentoring younger educators, she asks them, "Do you want to have a center, or do you want to have a holding tank?" She explicated that being educated and running a quality childcare program not only attracts a positive clientele, it is a way to advance the community as a whole.

Similarly, the idea of educating the next generation was a pattern in Ms. Sherice's narrative. While she expressed that she was too nervous to train others in a formal setting, she stressed the importance of educating and modeling "old school" parenting skills for the mothers and fathers in her program. Ms. Sherice was concerned that many of her parents lacked understanding of discipline and how to set high expectations for their children. She worried their lack of strong parenting was not preparing the children for life in the "real world."

In describing her value of education, Ms. Tara spoke fondly of her two daughters who were both college-educated. She said, "my daughter's a doctor. She has a doctorate, [and] she's a

dean at [a University]. My other daughter's still in [a state university], and I'm very particular about education.” The daughter who attended the state university worked as Ms. Tara’s employee in her program. Through mentoring her daughter in the work of child care and education, Ms. Tara exemplified the tradition that Bernard and Bernard (1998) described when they wrote, “Black mothers are expected to pass on the torch to their daughters, who are expected to become the next generation of mothers, grandmothers, or othermothers, to guard future generations” (p. 46).

While The Storytellers all had some college experience and pursued professional development, they placed heavy value and respect on the wisdom of elders and the experiential knowledge of veterans in the field. This form of knowledge was held in higher regards than the standards for formal education set by external agencies to determine the level of quality in a program. During the community talk, Ms. Sherice told the other Storytellers, “I’m still [rated as] a three-star [program], but I think I’m a five because I’ve been in the business forever.” She explained that every other aspect of her business was highly rated, but she does not “have the patience to go to schooling.” The other Storytellers affirmed that Ms. Sherice’s years in the field and experiential knowledge should be more highly valued by the QRIS. LaToya said, “I feel like the grand[mother]ed in and older ones, they shouldn't have to do that [validate their knowledge through schooling].” LaToya went on to say that the focus on formal schooling is one the reasons her “passion wasn't for the stars [rating system].” Even though LaToya went back to school and earned two university credentials in ECE, she did not do it for “the stars;” she did it to “raise the bar for [her] community.”

The Storytellers valued professional learning yet, respected the experiential knowledge gained from years serving children and families. Ms. Felicia and Ms. Sherice reminisced about

how when they first entered the field, their passion and skill for working with children was validated by the community instead of external regulatory agencies. Ms. Felicia said, “Back then, it was just a letter from five people that was notarized, saying that they knew me and knew that I loved and care for the kids.” As mentors, counselors, mothers, othermothers, and care providers, their cultural knowledge fortified The Storytellers’ aspiration to secure the future of the community by educating themselves then passing their skills, experiential knowledge, and wisdom to the next generation of educators.

“No, This Isn't Babysitting”: Beyond Child Care

Closely related to their commitment to being conduits of knowledge for their communities is the final theme that emerged in the examination of The Storytellers’ lives and personal backgrounds. Each Storyteller had an awareness that their role within the community reached beyond their profession as childcare providers. Although The Storytellers were passionate about their work with children, their narratives illustrated Dougherty’s (2004) words that, “The genuine [Black] teacher knows that [her] duty is not abounded by the four walls of the classroom. [She] is dealing with something more—with social conditions” (p.13). As such, The Storytellers fulfilled various roles in the community that were rooted deeply within their aspirations for helping others and advancing their people. For example, Ms. Tara shared that she was very active in her local church before the pandemic forced the congregation onto a virtual platform. In addition to singing and leading the children’s choir, Ms. Tara taught in the vacation Bible school, organized the church picnics, and oversaw various other events and outings for her church community.

Ms. Felicia also explained that she was very active in her church which gave her the connections she needed to serve hot meals to the families in her neighborhood during the

pandemic. In addition to her work in the church, Ms. Felicia explained she has always had a passion for helping mothers of young children. At one point, she wanted to start a group home for young mothers and their children, but instead, she helps mothers through her childcare business and offers her home as a shelter to help mothers get back on their feet. Ms. Felicia explained she wants “to be able to help them in their struggles, help them with their short and long-term goals, and [make] sure they're not giving up just because.” With this, Ms. Felicia described how she makes herself available as a mentor and counselor for the young mothers in her program. She said,

I hear a lot of stories all day. All the time it's something—even the [mothers] where I just want to shake somebody up versus grab and hug them. Hearing [the mothers'] stories, can be overwhelming sometimes. But they are touching, and you want to do something to help somebody.

Ms. Felicia immediately embraced the title and role of a “community mother” when I first explained my work to her, and her narrative illustrates how she embodies the work in every aspect of her life.

Like Ms. Felicia, Anya originally planned to serve the community through founding a group home for troubled girls. She shared that in a past relationship, she was victimized with “mental and physical abuse.” Anya explained that, “when I came out of that situation, it pushed me to know exactly what I did *not* want, and it encouraged me to speak up to help others who are in that situation— who don't have a outlet.” Anya’s heart yearned to help women who “don't have the knowledge or never learned self-love, or [those who] don't see the good in themselves, which makes them stay in those abusive (mentally and physically) relationships.” This passion

led her to organize women’s empowerment events to build “that support system” for women with similar stories.

Anya explained that she not only wanted to help women who already experienced abuse and other gendered oppressions, but she desired to help the next generation make choices to protect them from being victimized in the first place. Anya said, “it’s very, very important now for the young girls and young ladies to know their selves, to love their selves, and not be seeking it somewhere else.” This was especially heavy on Anya’s heart because she has a daughter who is coming of age. She said, “that would be my biggest fear—for her to fall through the cracks, and as a teenager, peer pressure pulls her in the wrong direction.”

While some of The Storytellers’ influence in their community took place outside of the walls of their programs, other Storytellers used the programs themselves to impact the community. For example, Sunni was passionate about cultivating the gift of language within the children of her program. In our conversation, she discussed how as a New York-born Dominican, she was sorely aware of the segregation of the Black and Latin communities in our city. In response, she determined she would “bring something different to the northside for early childhood.” With that intention, she built the curriculum and daily routines for the children around sharing her culture and linguistic capital through teaching Spanish.

Similarly, LaToya used her program as a testament to the excellence that could come from her specific zip code. She explained that when the state QRIS system was first implemented, there were low expectations for the centers in her community. Most of the family and center-based programs in her zip code were rated as two- or three-star programs. However, LaToya was determined, “I wanted to raise the expectations for childcare in my area and for

home childcare because they feel like we're babysitting; [but] I'm like, 'No. This isn't babysitting.'”

LaToya was committed to empowering herself through education to advance the standard of care and education in her community. Her words echoed the resolution of the National Association of Colored Women, established over 120 years prior—"lifting as we climb." As illustrated by the previous sections, The Storytellers' cultural knowledge— based in their faith, boss mentality, and passion for the education and empowerment of Black women— was a guiding force for their actions both before and throughout the pandemic. Like generations of Black women care providers and educators before them, The Storytellers rooted themselves in these tacit epistemologies and ways of being to ensure the survival and advancement of the Black community.

Cultural Capitals

Through the examination of The Storytellers' narratives, it was evident that each of their unique life experiences developed their cultural knowledge and equipped them with various forms of capital. In chapter two, I explain how these forms of capital stand counter-hegemonically to Western patriarchal capitalism and give precedence to the cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities of The Storytellers as Black women (Yosso, 2005; Yosso & García, 2007). The women skillfully employed these various capitals to navigate their everyday interactions and overcome the challenges they encountered along their journeys. Among the capitals most evident in their stories were: social, navigational, and aspirational capital.

Social Capital

Yosso (2005) describes social capital as the networks of people and community resources which aid in navigating social systems. It was clear The Storytellers were a key source of social

capital for the families in their program simply by opening their businesses during the pandemic and enabling the parents to continue to work. However, the resources The Storytellers provided parents during the pandemic went further than caring for their children. For example, when the pandemic first began, Ms. Sherice realized the schools would soon close and children who normally attended school during the day would need extended childcare hours. Ms. Sherice provided a mother in her program contact information so the mother could make arrangements for her school-aged children to attend Ms. Sherice's program. She said, "I would always talk to [the mother] to make sure that she stay up on what she needs— the information— because I know they was saying that [the schools] was going to eventually close up." Although Ms. Sherice tried to accommodate this mother by making her program available, the mother procrastinated until it was too late, and she ended up having to take the children to work with her.

Ms. Felicia and Ms. Tara also shared accounts of how they used their networks and social capital to support the children and families during the pandemic. Even though she closed her center in the beginning of the pandemic to do a deep sanitation, Ms. Felicia still fed hot meals to the families of her program and neighbor. She explained that even though her program was closed, she would wake up early to make hot breakfasts of "cheesy grits and eggs and sausages or bacon" for the community. Other days, she gave out cereal boxes and milk that the parents could feed their children. She networked with the head of the food pantry at her church and another local non-profit organization to gather cases of donations (i.e., bacon, eggs, milk, diapers, and wipes), which she then prepared and distributed from her home. Ms. Felicia explained, the parents would come to her door with masks and gloves, and she would ask, "How many kids are in the house?" Then, she distributed grocery bags of food and provisions

accordingly. Ms. Felicia laughed as she told me, “I would do it to where the dads were calling, they'd call and go, ‘Is there some more of them cheesy grits?’” She continued to explain the system she created to keep the families fed, “So the days I did the hot breakfast, I would do sandwiches and sub sandwiches for the lunch. The days that I did hot dinners, then I would do the continental-style breakfast.”

Ms. Felicia’s story shows that although she was self-quarantined for two weeks of the pandemic, she activated her boss mentality and engaged her social capital to sustain the families of her community. Ms. Tara also explained how she employed her connections from her previous work in the school district to benefit the families in her care. Ms. Tara was adamant about providing the children of her program the educational support they needed, even during the pandemic. Therefore, she took it on herself to get a child in her program professionally evaluated to ensure they got the professional attention they needed. She explained,

I have a child I'm thinking possibly may be autistic. She started like two days ago and— little issue there. I have some friends that [teach] special ed at [the local school district], so I'm trying to hook up with them to come and assess her for me.

In addition to working with her associates in the school district, Ms. Tara connected with her aunt, who is a retired teacher. Her aunt helps Ms. Tara observe and identify the needs of children in the program and suggest the necessary “formal assessment.” These accounts illustrate how The Storytellers used their networks and social capital to address the physical and academic needs of the children and families throughout the pandemic.

While The Storytellers evidently engaged their networks and social capital throughout the pandemic, during the community talk I asked where women receive support for themselves. As previously discussed, both LaToya and Ms. Sherice shared that they lost major sources of

support and connection with the death of their friends. However, Ms. Felicia added, “one of my biggest desires is to network with people.” She said, “I think my support is coming from stuff like this—people and talking to *us* [like-minded women in the field] and hearing what everybody else is doing.” She valued developing new connections so she could maintain the emotional strength and professional knowledge needed to effectively serve her children and families.

Later, Ms. Sherice shared that she too enjoyed connecting with the other Storytellers and wanted to contact them to schedule a time to reconnect “after things calm down a bit.” This was especially meaningful to me because it was evidence my intentions around EFN resonated with The Storytellers. Because of the connections they cultivated through the community talk, The Storytellers developed a new branch in their networks of social capital. Moreover, they intended to foster these relationships even beyond the course of this study.

Navigational Capital

The Storyteller’s accounts were filled with examples of skills and knowledge they used to navigate systems that were not created for their success. As mentioned in the first part of this chapter, some of The Storytellers did not collect personal income from their businesses after paying their overhead, taxes, and other expenditures. Even so, Ms. Sherice explained that to accommodate the parents of her program and offer affordable services, she doesn’t charge copays. This means Ms. Sherice accepts whatever rate the state deems is necessary to care for a child, regardless of the rate necessary to meet her desired program budget.

Similarly, Ms. Tara maintained a low rate for her services because she considered her work more of a ministry than a source of income. However, both Ms. Tara and Ms. Sherice navigated the tax system so they could offer an affordable rate, maintain their businesses, and live comfortably without writing themselves an actual check. Ms. Tara explained that instead of

paying herself and completing at 10-99, “I do a 10-40, a schedule C, schedule E, and [...] adjusted income” Through this alternative method, Ms. Tara ran her business, maintained her household, and paid an employee. Furthermore, as explained, Ms. Tara again navigated the financial system during the pandemic by laying off her employee and working by herself. Because Ms. Tara’s employee was laid-off, she could collect the government’s unemployment insurance to secure income during the pandemic, so Ms. Tara did not need to pay from her own limited funds.

In addition to navigating the financial challenges of self-employment, The Storytellers showed navigational capital in other areas of their lives and businesses. For example, Anya described how before she opened an in-home childcare program, she managed a group home for adult living. Anya explained that she eventually tried to open her own group home because she knew she wanted to be her own boss. However, she had a friend, who had a “degree and everything,” that struggled while opening her own group. Anya said, “The state allowed her to open for maybe a month or two. And then the [state] lady was just really mean and was like, ‘Oh, well you're not ready,’ and just closed her [friend’s group home] back down.” After witnessing the “backlash” from state regulatory agencies, Anya realized it would be difficult to open her own group home while in her position at the time.

Anya reassessed her situation and considered opening a home for the elderly. However, she soon realized she did not want to give up owning her home in order to finance the business. Anya explained how she finally she asked herself, “What can I do right now in today where this house will basically be paying for herself, and I'm my own boss?” Her answer was in opening her own childcare program. Anya knew she wanted to work for herself but encountered numerous barriers while actualizing her dream. However, in navigating the pushback from state

agencies while pursuing her group homes, Anya found she could still help children, pay for her home, and be her own boss by opening a family childcare program.

Anya's story of navigational capital does not end with her successfully opening her childcare program. A year later, during the pandemic, Anya recognized the increased need for quality childcare as so many family and group programs closed permanently due to the financial impact of the pandemic. Anya explained that when the pandemic began in March 2020, DCF allowed licensed FCPs to exceed their normal ratios to service the children of essential workers and those who could not attend school. However, in September 2020, when the children returned to school on virtual platforms, DCF did not allow the same considerations. Anya described the dilemma in that she still has families who need childcare services, but she no longer has the space on the appropriate shift to accommodate them. Anya said, "[DCF] gave us [FCPs] that flexibility and then they took it back." She explained, "I don't want to lose any of my families, so I'm really trying to figure out how is this going to work. That's really what's pushing me to try to find a building quick."

Instead of turning down the families who she could no longer serve because of the changes in DCF policies, Anya activated her boss mentality to circumnavigate the whole system. At the time of this study, she was completing the financial paperwork to open a center-based childcare program designed to accommodate the needs of online learners and the families on her growing waitlist. Anya transformed her frustration with the way DCF was managing the situation into an opportunity to grow her business and better serve her community.

Aspirational Capital

Anya's story is not only a prime example of navigation capital, but she displayed significant aspirational capital. Yosso (2005) described aspirational capital as the ability of

Communities of Color to maintain hopes and dreams, even in the face of barriers. Accordingly, Anya continued to implement plans to grow her business despite significant systemic barriers. In her interview, Anya explained that in addition to pursuing a facility to establish her center-based childcare program, she was in the process of copyrighting the name of her business. She explained that she “always knew if I was going to do [a business] I didn't want to do it small.” Her passion streamed through the phone as she described her future business plans,

I want [my program] to be not just a learning center but assisted living. I want [my program] to be everywhere. I want people to know when they see the name [of my program] that it's [Anya Smith] and that I'm the one over it. I do. I want to be recognized for the good—that I'm either offering jobs, providing employment or something. I do.

That is my goal before I leave Earth, to make my name known.

Anya was resolute in her aspirations to become a household name for the good she would do in the community. She remained unshaken by the obstacles and “haters” she had encountered on her journey. She said, “There's always somebody in the background there that is just honestly waiting on your downfall, and, I'm just going to sail through it.” Despite the opposition, Anya found confidence in knowing, “you're not up unless you have at least one hater.”

Like Anya, Ms. Felicia was also searching for a building to establish a center-based childcare program. She was inspired by the skills and knowledge she acquired in the university childcare credentials she took over the last year. She reflected, “[the] administrative course taught me too much for family [childcare]. You can't just sit on all of that [information] so you'll blow up in the house [program].” With this, Ms. Felicia, determined, “I got to go further.” She explained her plan was to buy “a nice big house right now to first have of my own” then, after getting “situated and settled” she would begin the next steps toward acquiring a center. At the

time of the community talk, Ms. Felicia was excited because she recently found the ideal home for herself and her business. She told the group of Storytellers she was already working out the details and collaborating with her licensor to transition her program to the new space.

For both Anya and Ms. Felicia, their aspirational capital led them to continue building their programs and legacies through expanding to a center-based childcare program. However, LaToya explained that her aspiration was to downsize her program so she could give her “110%” to the school-aged children in their online learning. She said, “I want to go back down. I don't need all them numbers right now only because I'm not in the headspace to lead, to give them my 110% that I give.” LaToya saw an opportunity in adapting her program to serve children of four years and older who were now going to school online and needed more academic support. As she walked around her program, she showed me the recent changes she made. She painted the walls yellow to brighten the space and removed her personal furniture from the living room to fully transition the space to look more like a “center.” LaToya also removed the cribs she had in the second bedroom to make space for a quiet homework area for the virtual learners. Later, when I checked in with her, she was excited about the recessed lighting put in the main room to brighten the space even more. LaToya expressed pride in the environment she created for her new phase of business by saying, “I just got to the place where I was like, ‘This is good’. I don't care what you say, what you think. This is the bomb. Would your child come here? Yes.”

The Storytellers’ social, navigational, and aspirational capital were embedded in their cultural knowledge and empowered their work as caregivers, educators, and community mothers during the COVID-19 health crisis. As community guardians, the Black women family childcare providers navigated financial hardships, social adversities, and systemic barriers to continue their legacy of nurturing, educating, and sustaining the Black community.

Chapter 5: Discussion

For centuries, Black women care providers, mothers, othermothers, and educators have fought to educate, care for, and sustain the Black community throughout times of economic and social hardship (Collins, 1991; Dougherty, 2004; Roberts, 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 2001, Tuominen, 2003). This study describes the cultural knowledge of Black women early childcare educators as they reacted and organized to support young learners and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. The work also identifies the types of capital with which the women engaged as they navigated their roles as community mothers. Learning the perspectives and experiences of the Black women family providers offers a critical counter-perspective of the dominant narrative during the worldwide health crisis where childcare providers and early educators were not recognized as essential professionals. To honor the voices of The Storytellers and illuminate their unique perspectives, I used methods rooted in Black feminist thought and my framework of endarkened feminist narrative. The individual stories gathered through this sacred and rigorous work yielded powerful insight into the lives of Black women family childcare providers (FCPs).

This research was centered around understanding how Black women family childcare providers responded to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the pandemic, the social-economic upheaval, and community unrest during the summer of 2020 seemed peripheral within The Storytellers' description of their experiences. Instead, they focused on maintaining their households and communities through serving children and families. Although the social backdrop changed, the women's fundamental work of community mothering within their family programs changed little. In essence, the pillars of their cultural knowledge (i.e., faith, education,

and community advancement) remained constant regardless of the health risk and financial insecurities brought by the conditions of the pandemic.

The media of the time was inundated with conversations of the “unprecedented” impact of the pandemic on Communities of Color. Journal articles and other news outlets highlighted the disparities in health care, education opportunities, internet access, and other differences in living conditions between rich and impoverished communities (Lockwood & Winter, 2020; Scheiber & Nelson, 2020). However, these race- and class-based social determinants and the subsequent hardships are endemic within these communities. Black American history illustrates a legacy of race-based inequality, institutional injustice, and the exploitation of Black families within the U.S. political economy (Anderson, 1988; Collins, 2002; Kendi, 2019; Taylor, 1998). This is not to minimize the significant impact and mortalities caused by COVID-19, yet the media’s “illumination” of social-economic disparities, inequities in health care, and inequitable educational access, was not a revelation for the Black community. Instead, it was perceived as a similar struggle by another name (Graham & Brooks, 2020).

As members of the urban Black community, The Storytellers in this study were familiar with conditions of socio-economic hardship. They were affected on multiple levels (socially, financially, and emotionally) by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, the women stood as community guardians, opening their programs as safe havens for children and families. While their role was crucial to maintaining societal functioning, the women were profoundly aware their essential work was taken for granted within the community and by society as a whole.

To begin this discussion, I interrogate the racialized and gendered social institutions that have kept Black women care providers unrecognized as essential in their work. This larger context provides a foundational understanding of The Storytellers’ positioning within a

compilation of oppressive institutions that influence societal perceptions of their work (Tuominen, 2003). Through a Black feminist lens, I then discuss my findings to describe how The Storytellers resisted social-political invisibility and economic marginalization. As a Voice of Color, I illuminate the many ways racism and classism continue to deny Childcare Providers of Color equal membership and recognition in the nation's essential workforce (Amoah, 1997). In doing so, I interweave stories from my grandmother Margaret's life— giving her voice in this work as an honorary Storyteller.

Gendered Institutions and Child Care

Traditionally in the United States, there is a dualistic view of family and the economic market. Family and childrearing are often associated with the private sphere that is in contrast to socio-economic production and the market. These ideologies, that separate the family from the workforce, are based in the era of industrialization that focused on white, middle-class families. The “workplace” was a place of paid labor, rationality, and competition—all associated with masculine, paternal, and white behaviors. Contrastingly, the home or family was a place of nurturing, affection, and caregiving— “feminine” and maternal attributes (Tuominen, 2003).

Subsequently, mothers and fathers were assigned gendered roles within the family infrastructure (Collins, 2002; Tuominen, 2003). In accordance with this system, my grandmother stayed home for years to raise her four children. Meanwhile, my grandfather traveled the world with the Navy and sent his checks home to the family. Although essential, motherhood and child-rearing were perceived as incompatible with participation in the labor force. This racist, classist, and patriarchal notion contributes to the devaluation of the childcare profession today. It is rooted in faulty logic that says if women are caregivers by nature (not skill) and their work is motivated by love (not money), then child care must not be “real work” (Tuominen, 2003).

Within a divergent perspective, Tuominen (2003) explains that the very existence of family childcare, where women perform care work in their homes, debunks the idea that child care and workforce production are incompatible. Instead, family childcare challenges us to move beyond traditional notions of “work” and ground the understanding of the profession in the daily lives of the women who perform the work.

In developing my understanding of the lives of the family childcare providers, it became evident that although the women stood in opposition to patriarchal ideologies of child care and the workforce, their decisions to enter the profession were still informed by larger institutions, belief systems, and social practices. Yet, because of their identities as mothers, sole providers, and members of the community with other social positions, The Storytellers found family childcare an effective means to support themselves, their households, and their communities.

Moreover, five of the six women had biological children or children they were responsible for raising in addition to their work in their programs. At the time of the study, Anya, Sunni, and LaToya’s children were young enough to be fully dependent on their mothers for food, shelter, clothing, academic support, and other tangible needs. Accordingly, Ms. Tara, Sunni, and LaToya all mentioned providing for their children while securing economic support as rationale for beginning their family childcare businesses. All of The Storytellers’ biological children attended their childcare program as a part of their upbringing. LaToya even referred to her biological children as “daycare kids,” referring to the way they were raised alongside the other non-biological children in her care.

For many low-income and immigrant Women of Color, modeling self-reliance and financial autonomy in the face of overwhelming odds represents one of the many dimensions of motherhood (Collins, 1987; Dill, 1998; Michel, 1999; Tuominen, 2003). Specifically, economic

support for their children through paid work “has been an important and valued dimension of Afrocentric definitions of Black motherhood” Collins, 1987, p.124). As an example, my grandmother returned to school when my grandfather expressed frustration over being the sole financial provider for their family of six. She earned her degree as a nurse to have the financial security to sustain her children, with or without my grandfather’s income. Similarly, The Storytellers understood their work as a way to fulfill their many responsibilities as mothers. Although they had various identities, life experiences, and social locations, their role as mothers and providers for their families took precedence.

In a society founded on patriarchal principles, the woman-dominated profession of caring for children remains diminished and unrecognized as true work. However, by participating in the work of paid child care within their homes, The Storytellers sustained themselves and their children while countering gendered institutions that set child care in opposition to production in the labor market. In the face of the devaluation of their passion and profession, The Storytellers rooted themselves in their cultural knowledge and persisted in their belief that they are professionals within an essential workforce.

In the following sections, I will discuss the meaning of what I found through the examination of The Storytellers’ unique perspectives and cultural knowledge within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. I will explain how their narratives connect to my framework of endarkened feminist narrative (EFN) and how The Storytellers demonstrated the tenets of Black feminist thought (BFT) in practice. The first theme showed their cultural knowledge was rooted in their *spirituality and deep faith in God*. The second theme showed the women possessed a *boss mentality*. This take-charge attitude drove the women to act as autonomous agents within their businesses and communities. The third theme that emerged was The Storytellers’

determination to *educate and empower themselves and the next generation* of women. The fourth and last theme in describing the women's cultural knowledge was their understanding that their *roles as community mothers stretched beyond the reach of their childcare businesses*. My discussion then moves to a reflection on cultural wealth, endarkened feminist narrative, and the implications of this research.

“No One Else *Sets You Free*”: Spirituality as Cultural Knowledge

In my exploration of The Storytellers' experiences, the first finding describes how the women's cultural knowledge was rooted in their spirituality and deep faith in God. The narratives showed the women's faith encompassed every aspect of their work and informed their worldview. This manifested in the way they viewed their work as a “ministry” and guided the children according to biblical principles. During the community talk, the women connected in their shared faith to pray for Ms. Sherice as she mourned the loss of her friend. Correspondingly, LaToya, Ms. Sherice, and Ms. Tara discussed how they prayed daily with the children— modeling faith, gratitude, and dependence on God. LaToya explained that in times of great stress, the children witnessed her “cry out to God.” Ms. Tara even took the children of her program to church with her on Sundays so they could participate in the children's choir.

Throughout the narratives, it was highly evident faith and spirituality were intrinsic qualities of The Storytellers' cultural knowledge, pedagogy, and child-rearing practices. Likewise, some of my earliest memories in my grandmother's family childcare was sitting with the other children and watching her illustrate Bible stories on her homemade flannel board. She built the foundation of our spirituality by explaining God was bigger than everything we were afraid of and teaching us how to talk to Him about anything.

Like my grandmother, many Black women are motivated to enter family childcare because they feel a spiritual calling to serve God through serving their communities (Tuominen, 2003). Even before opening her family childcare business, my grandmother led weekly Bible studies in her living room for the children of the neighborhood. For twenty years, she taught the children's Sunday school in her church and led the children's vacation Bible school every summer. While research discusses the BWECs' spiritual motivation for entering the field, I have found the profundity of the women's spirituality is highly unchronicled in early education research.

Beyond the field of early childhood education, however, the connection of faith and Black education has been more visible. In his commentary on the Black church, education and self-determination, Mitchell (2010) discusses the intertwined history of spirituality, religion, and the advancement of the Black community. The quintessential leaders and foundation of the Black community have been primarily composed of teachers and preachers. The Storytellers' value of imparting spirituality and intellect to the children of their program continues the legacy of Black intellectuals and spiritual leaders like Anna Julia Cooper, Richard Allen Turner, Mary McLeod Bethune, Dr. Martin Luther King, and their 21st century torchbearers—Cornel West, bell hooks, and Michael Eric Dyson, who held spirituality central in their work.

Despite the historical tension with Afrocentric spirituality, the Christian church has been at the root of Black women educators' organization for social change since the late 19th century (Gayle, 2011; Mitchell, 2010). Dodson and Gikes (1987) suggest, "If any one ministry could be identified as central to the black sacred cosmos of the twentieth century, it would be education... Black people defined education of the oppressed and the oppressors as central tasks of Christian mission" (p. 84). Discriminatory policies in post-Civil War childcare establishments and social

welfare legislation forced Black mothers and educators to secretly organize in churches to strategize the creation of education opportunities for their communities (Cahan, 1989; Collins, 2016b; Cunningham & Osborn, 1979). Centuries of race-based and gendered oppression has taught Black women that “no one else *sets* you free” (Collins, 2015). Instead, Black women have learned to rely on God and self-determination for their empowerment and liberation.

Although the tenets of Black feminist thought (BFT) do not explicitly consider the spirituality of Black women, BFT discusses the way Black women rebel negative, controlling representations of Black womanhood and reject their socially defined ‘place’ in favor of creating their own self-definitions and self-empowerment (Collins 2002, 2015; Davis, 2018; Dillard, 2000; Taylor, 1998). BFT’s emphasis on Black women’s self-definition is integral in situating Black women's spirituality in education and learning (Gayle, 2011).

Addressing this gap in Black feminist thought, my approach of endarkened feminist narrative accounted for The Storytellers’ faith and spirituality in their stories. Through endarkened feminist narrative, I committed to honoring the sacred and maintaining a spiritual disposition in praxis. My position is inspired by the (re)visioning aspect of Dillard’s (2000) endarkened feminist epistemology, which involved awakening to what we hear, touch, feel, and intuit and the spiritual as evidence of things unseen. With this approach, The Storytellers’ descriptions of tacit understandings, unexplained unctons, and the internal guidance of the Holy Spirit was validated as a part of their epistemic perspective represented in their cultural knowledge.

Reclaiming Power through Self-Definition

The second finding I describe is also related to the Black woman’s self-determination and empowerment. The Storytellers’ narratives demonstrated how the women empowered

themselves in the face of gendered racism through their *boss mentality*. For this study, I use the term *boss mentality*, because it reflects The Storytellers' language as they described their agency and skills as independent businesswomen. I define *boss mentality* as a take-charge attitude that drove the women to act as autonomous agents within their businesses and communities. As bosses, the women knew what they wanted and used navigational strategies rooted in their cultural knowledge to attain their aspiration. The Storytellers knew their value as Black women and community matriarchs, self-defined as quality educators within an essential profession, and reclaimed their power of self-definition in resistance to gendered racism.

The notion of self-definition and self-valuation, as the first tenet of Black feminist thought, asserts that Black women empower themselves through establishing positive images and repel negative, controlling representations of Black womanhood (Collins, 1989; Davis, 2018). The concept of reclaiming power through self-definition is embodied in Anya's description of her understanding of what it means to be a Black woman serving the Black community. She said,

Being a Black woman is awesome. It's so unfortunate that some Black women do not see, understand, or respect their own power. Some [Black women], for so long, are in with negative people. The [negative] energy begins to instill inside of them and they don't recognize their own greatness. I was once that girl who would listen to what other people thought about me, and I did not recognize my own greatness. [However,] once you are a woman who understands her own greatness, her own strength, there is nothing that a Black woman or a woman can't do. The Black woman is strong not just in presence but in voice and everything that she stands for. That is my purpose.

Anya's words embody the transformative work of a Black woman's self-definition and self-valuation. She and the other Storytellers stand as a testament to the power of Black women who

know their value. Through voicing their truths, the women stood in opposition to the backdrop of invisibility and social repression experienced in their daily lives through the effects of *gendered racism* (Essed, 1991). Each reclaimed her identity as an essential force in the American social infrastructure and demanded recognition of her contributions to the field of early childcare and education.

Through gendered racism, Black women are subjected to gendered and classed forms of racism rooted in societal stereotypes and controlling images. Racist and sexist notions, such as the caretaking mammy figure and domineering sapphire stereotype, work to objectify and marginalize Black women in the workplace, education institutions, and other social arenas (Collins, 2002; Davis, 2018). Furthermore, society maintains Black women's low status by solely associating authoritative ways of speaking with dominant groups, specifically white males. As such, standards of "good" behavior like being quiet, uncritical, and accommodating become antithetical to Black womanhood and notions of professionalism (Davis, 2018). Conversely, Black feminist thought challenges the power dynamics underlying the process of societal definition and demands the self-valuation of Black women (Davis, 2018). Accordingly, The Storytellers resisted these stereotypes that would have them relegated to social, economic, and political insignificance. Instead, they transformed the conditions of gendered racism and motherhood to redefine themselves as successful businesswomen and proprietors of an essential service.

The Storytellers, in their self-definition as bosses and professionals in their field, spoke against the way their professionalism was challenged by state regulatory agencies. Black feminist thought clearly explains that self-definition involves challenging political knowledge and validation processes that result in externally defined, stereotypical images of Black

womanhood (Collins, 1989, 2000; Davis, 2018). For example, Ms. Sherice self-identified as a quality provider despite being demerited by the state agencies' validation process due to her level of formal education. Through her self-definition, Ms. Sherice challenged the delegitimization of her professional knowledge and resisted the de-validation of her program by an external rater. Furthermore, she engaged in self-valuation by challenging the notion that quality care and education can only be achieved through participation in the Western validation process of institutionalized education.

Instead, Ms. Sherice took pride in the parent feedback she received years after their children graduated from her program. Despite her limited formal education, the parental feedback assured Ms. Sherice the children from her program were not only ready for academic success, but they were socio-emotionally competent, spiritually sound, and rooted in a sense of community. However, this culture-based definition of a quality early learning experience is disregarded by standardized research- and evidence-based perceptions of early education.

In my endarkened feminist narrative (EFN) approach, the intention is to illuminate counternarratives to develop a more holistic view of social institutions and issues of power. EFN also acknowledges the empowerment of one's self and the collective that occurs when Black women share their counternarratives. This empowerment occurred as The Storytellers reaffirmed with each other of their quality and value in the field, despite the lower rating they received from external raters. The women challenged the power of culturally exclusory and narrow methods of measuring quality care and education that continue to diminish the value they placed on experiential learning and cultural wisdom.

Within this social system, Ms. Sherice and other educators whose backgrounds do not align with white, middle-class values are expected to be enculturated with institutional

knowledge and Eurocentric standards to be legitimized in their profession (Blank, 2010; Goffin, 1996). As such, Black women who are elders in the community and veterans in the field are measured by a system that devalues the intrinsic professional characteristics, cultural knowledge, and methods of child guidance valued by their communities. Countering this narrative, The Storytellers reclaimed their power and identities as quality educators and care providers.

Educating the Next Generation

The third finding I identified was The Storytellers' determination to educate themselves and the next generation of women. Consistent with existing literature pertaining to the importance of supportive, mentoring relationships among Black women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Edwards, 2000; Gilkes, 1986), several of The Storytellers acted as mentors and role models to other Black women. Ms. Felicia not only worked with the young mothers in her program, but she took pride in developing the skills of the young educator she was training. Similarly, LaToya discussed how she mentored younger providers and developed their skills and confidence as independent businessowners. LaToya specifically mentioned she felt the women needed the guidance of a younger Black woman who they could relate to rather than an older, "Granny Anne" character. Anya also considered herself a role model as she shared her story of overcoming domestic violence and abuse to empower other young women in similar situations. Anya's actions in raising her daughter and other young women as resisters to gendered and race-based oppression affirms the work of Tracy Robinson and Janie Ward (1991). Their research illustrates how Black mothers consciously raise their daughters to assert themselves as intelligent, beautiful, strong, and worthy of respect. Black mothers and othermothers' guidance teaches the next generation to resist the barrage of societal messages that devalue Blackness and belittles Black women.

The Storytellers transmitted an ideological, social, and cultural inheritance to the young educators. This was a similar trait of Black women teachers in the early twentieth century who also believed it was their unique responsibility to help uplift their communities through educating the next generations. Such women “often saw themselves more as ‘uplifters’ than as working women...Educating the children of poor unlettered blacks was considered part of their moral and social obligations as educated women” (Harley, 1982, p. 257). This cultural notion of uplifting through education reaches deep into the Afrocentric understanding of collectivism and one’s sense of responsibility for the liberation and advancement of the Black community (Akbar, 1991; Allen & Bagozzi, 2001; Anderson, 1988; Carson, 2009; Collins, 1989, 2000; Nobles, 1991). In sharing their passion, pedagogies, and experiential wisdom with young educators, the women were planting seeds of culturally relevant early care and education toward a more socially just future.

The Storytellers’ determination to uplift the next generation of educators aligns with the tenet of BFT focused on standpoint epistemology and EFN’s commitment to empowering one’s self and other Black women. Black women’s shared history of oppression and repression has fostered a unique epistemic standpoint and cultural knowledge that help us thrive in the face of intersecting oppressions (e.g., race, gender, class). These common experiences have fostered a distinctive epistemology, which includes a sense of intergenerational collectivism or symbolic kinship with other Black women rooted in their existence and survival in an inimical social environment (Collins, 1989).

Because individual Black women exist collectively within systems of domination, Black women not only appreciate their own standpoint, but are in the best position to understand other Black women (Collins, 2002). According to the strong Black woman collective theory, a primary

way in which Black women confront external hostilities is by retreating with other Black women to safe spaces where they can process, support, and confide in one another (Davis, 2018). In these spaces, Black women rejuvenate and empower each other towards resistance, survival, and transformation (Collins, 1989; Davis, 2018; Taylor, 1998).

In addition to mentoring younger Black women, each of the six Storytellers discussed the importance of relationships with other women in the community. Each showed sources of familial capital (Yosso, 2005) with other Black women. Ms. Sherice shared how she talked to her friend on a daily basis to reflect about their work and personal lives. LaToya described a similar relationship she had with her “spiritual mother” with whom she talked daily and who would often visit to help LaToya in her program. Anya described how her friends often came to her for advice and counsel in difficult situations; and, Ms. Felicia described how she connected to the other Black woman in her university courses to share navigational strategies and offer encouragement. This connection and relationship-building extended through the pandemic even after Ms. Felicia graduated from the course.

The Storytellers reached out to other women as a form of social support to counteract the isolation often associated with the nature of in-home childcare (Gerstenblatt et al., 2014; Tuominen, 2003), where many providers work with the children by themselves. The relationships they maintained with other Black women embody the notion of sisterhood, othermothering, and mentorship. Research illustrates how these connections with Black women through metaphorical and biological kinship are imperative to Black women’s wellbeing (Guiffrida, 2005; Hirt, et al., 2008; Vickery, 2016). For The Storytellers in this study, the relationships represented a significant source of social capital and navigational capital both before and throughout the pandemic. Similarly, developing social capital, sharing navigational

capital, and cultivating resistance capital against systemic inequalities is a core principle of my EFN approach and my intent in connecting The Storyteller through a community talk.

Scholarship of Black women's social history documents the importance of intergenerational resources sustaining Black families and communities (Acosta, 2019; Foster, 1993; Gilkes, 1986; Loder, 2005; McDonald, 1997; Tuominen, 2003). Black women's work of community activism differs from that of Black male's due to their own gendered and racial-ethnic experiences, which include mothering and othermothering (Gilkes, 1986; McDonald, 1997). Othermothering (Collins, 1989, 2000)—also described as *social motherhood* (Boris, 1993) or *activist mothering* (Naples, 1992)—is a form of community activism that addresses the needs of children and families.

Othermothering

Previous studies have described the concept of “othermothering” as the sense of care, responsibility, and kinship that manifests within the Black community through aunts, grandmothers, family friends, and educators who share in the social and cultural responsibility of raising children who are not of their own blood (Acosta, 2019; Foster, 1993; Loder, 2005). Accordingly, The Storytellers in this study were othermothers for the next generation of educators, as well as the children and parents in their programs. As mentioned in the findings, Ms. Felicia raised numerous extended family members who encountered difficult times. Her home was a revolving door for mothers and children who needed shelter and guidance. Ms. Felicia took it upon herself to become the community mother and take the women and children under her wing.

Ms. Felicia's story is reminiscent of my grandmother who also mothered various wayward youth from the community. My mother recalls her childhood growing up with “play

cousins”—like Millie, Ishmael, and Ike—who my grandmother raised alongside my mother and her siblings. My grandmother took on the responsibility of providing food, shelter, academic support, and moral guidance to these youth until they no longer needed her assistance. Moreover, she acted as a mentor and spiritual mother to dozens of young mothers, fathers, and children before she ever opened her childcare business.

Similarly, Ms. Sherice exemplified othermothering in her description of the “old-school” parental advice she offered the mothers and fathers in her program. Her account showed she shared in the social, spiritual, and cultural responsibility of raising the children. Likewise, Ms. Tara, who took the children of her program to church with her, shared the responsibility of the children’s spiritual growth as well as their academic and socio-emotional development. In describing how she advocated for the children who were receiving little teacher interaction through their virtual learning, Ms. Tara explained that she intervened on the children’s behalf because she would not have accepted a similar educational experience for her own daughters. The Storytellers’ narratives affirm prior research (Acosta, 2019; Case, 1997; Foster, 1993; Loder, 2005; Tuominen, 2003) that illustrates the sense of collectivism in the way Black educators and early care providers invest in other people’s children as if they were their own.

Networking

One of the major questions of this study asked how the Black women family childcare providers networked and connected to support young learners and their families during the pandemic. I anticipated The Storytellers’ would explain how they reached out to an extensive network of family providers and educators in the community to share ideas and support. However, I learned The Storytellers made few, if any, connections with other family providers during the pandemic. For example, Anya said she did not connect with anyone, while Sunni said

the only two providers she knew were on social media, Facebook and Instagram. LaToya, who had been in the field for over 20 years said, “I don't even know one person in family [childcare].” The only providers she knew operated in center-based programs. Ms. Sherice’s only connection was with one woman she knew since childhood. The women started their family childcare programs around the same time. Ms. Sherice described their relationship as helping each other through daily talks.

Ms. Felicia, who was new to the local childcare setting, discussed the benefit of being in the childcare credential program she was taking at the time. Her fellow classmates were the only providers she was able to reach out to during the pandemic. During the community talk, Ms. Felicia discussed how important building relationships with other family providers was to her. One of the major concerns she had with converting to a center-based program was that she may no longer be able to share information with the small group of family providers she was developing through her coursework. Ms. Felicia explained how building her network would give her someone to call when she or one of her parents were faced with a challenge. She said, “If I don't know something, I just want to know that it's on hand.”

Within the narratives of The Storytellers, I learned the more seasoned providers placed a higher value on connection with others in the field. Ms. Sherice, a woman with over 38 years in early childcare, shook her head at the siloed nature of some family childcare providers. She explained that she had few connections although there were numerous programs in her neighborhood to whom she reached out on different occasions. In our conversation, Ms. Sherice and I reflected on the fact that as she moves toward retirement, the childcare profession risks losing the wealth of experiential knowledge she has accumulated through the years.

In the community talk, The Storytellers emphasized the importance of training the next generation, however this is assumingly more difficult when novice family providers are not intentional about connecting and developing networks. Outside of Ms. Tara, who maintained connections from her experience in the local school district, many of The Storytellers were operating with little connection to others in the field. The women's main source of information was their assigned representatives from different state regulatory agencies. However, the findings illustrate how these connections to outside agencies were highly inconsistent. By cultivating meaningful relationships with intergenerational Black women across social locations, Black women family childcare providers can share resources and information while gaining validation and acceptance from women with a shared professional and cultural standpoint.

Through the EFN approach, these meaningful relationships across generations began to actualize during the community talk. All of The Storytellers urged me to share their contact information with the other women, so they could stay in touch and perhaps plan another talk in the future. In a reflection of her experience with the other Storytellers, LaToya appreciated that each Storyteller represented a different decade in life experience. She said, "I think the age difference was amazing because we both in our 30s. I think Mrs. [Felicia] in her 40s. Then [Ms. Sherice's] in her late 50s. That was perfect." Her comments acknowledged the transmission of cultural knowledge I have described as a key element of EFN. Through the EFN approach, the women were able to share knowledge and wisdom across generations and social and physical locations. They partook in the cultural tradition of sharing stories and experiences which allowed them to add to their collective funds of cultural knowledge (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Grace, et al., 2004), be validated in their epistemic standpoint (Collins, 1989; Richie, 2012), and cultivate meaningful relationships.

Interlocking Identities Beyond Child Care

The fourth finding in describing The Storytellers' cultural knowledge was their understanding that their roles as community mothers stretched beyond the scope of their childcare businesses. In my examination of the experiences and perspectives of Black women family childcare providers during the pandemic, the interplay of their various identities rose to the forefront. This finding aligns directly with the Black feminist principle of interlocking identities. The Storytellers were businessowners, nurturers, educators, mothers, othermothers, activists, and leaders in their communities. Each of these identities and social roles was informed by their cultural knowledge, informed their cultural knowledge, and cultivated the take-charge attitude the women had in their various realms of influence. Moreover, the identities were intertwined, so when one was impacted (i.e., businessowners), it had a significant effect on the others (i.e., heads of households, mothers), specifically during the conditions of the pandemic.

For example, as businessowners of in-home family childcare programs, The Storytellers were not only nurturers and educators, they managed every administrative and financial component of their businesses. During the pandemic, if they were to close their businesses, it would negatively impact the women's responsibilities as heads of households. This illustrates the significant dilemma the mothers and businesswomen faced as they determined their courses of action. They were simultaneously responsible for protecting their families against the threat of exposure to the virus, while maintaining their businesses and income to prevent financial repercussions.

In other narratives, The Storytellers were able to leverage their intersecting roles to benefit their work and communities. For example, because of their positions in their church communities, Ms. Tara and Ms. Felicia were able to provide academic support and provisions for

the families of their programs during the pandemic. Ms. Felicia connected with various stakeholders in her church and other community organizations to distribute hot meals, diapers, and other necessities to her families and neighbors. Similarly, Ms. Tara activated her social capital within the school district to gain the support and evaluations she needed to sustain the academic growth of her program's children throughout the pandemic. Both of these examples illustrate the intertwined nature of their social roles.

Their narratives also illustrated how The Storytellers' interlocking identities cultivated nuances in their biographies and added dimensions to their experiential funds of knowledge (Collins, 1993; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991). For example, outside of mothering and serving the families of her program, Anya discussed her deep passion for inspiring women to stand against abuse and domestic violence. Once she learned the principles of self-love and her own value as a Black woman, Anya became a force for women's empowerment. In her activism, she collaborated with community stakeholders to facilitate events for women to network and build resistance capital around this relevant topic in Black womanhood. Anya's narrative exemplifies one of the many ways Black women confront and dismantle structures of race, class, and gender oppression through self-definition and self-valuation (Collins 2002, 2015; Davis, 2018; Dillard, 2000; Taylor, 1998). Moreover, through sharing her experiential wisdom with other women, Anya engaged in sisterhood and political activism toward resisting and transforming daily discrimination (Collins 1989, 2002, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2018; Dillard, 2000; Majors, 2004; Taylor, 1998).

Within her program, Sunni used her identity and capital as a bilingual Black Latina to offer children the gift of language. Rooted in her distinct cultural heritage, Sunni resisted the local school system's segregation and perpetuation of ignorance around cultural-linguistic

diversity in the Black community. She determined to work against these ideologies by educating the children in her program to become bilingual and culturally pluralistic. Family providers often seek families who share similar cultural heritage and instill racial-ethnic pride in the children they care for (Tuominen, 2003). Sunni extended this notion through her commitment to the cultural and linguistic development of Black children across the African diaspora. As described in Black feminist thought, Sunni's cultural biography and life experiences gave her a unique standpoint through which she created meaning and added to the collective consciousness of the Black community (Collins, 1989; Richie, 2012).

Endarkened feminist narrative, encapsulates the (re)cognizing component of Dillard's (2000) endarkened feminist epistemology. (Re)cognizing involves changing our thinking about who Black women are, what we have accomplished, and the cultural and social brilliance of Black women. As a demonstration of their social brilliance and cultural knowledge, The Storytellers leveraged their various social roles and identities to advance the care and education of the children of their programs. This work is a continuation of Black women's legacy of going beyond child care to engage in community activism and address the diverse needs of Black children and families (Boris, 1989, 1993; Gilkes, 1986; McDonald, 1997; Tuominen, 2003).

Expanding on Cultural Wealth

In my study, I examined the manifestations of The Storyteller's cultural knowledge. In doing so, I observed the women's cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and their innate ability to engage social capital, resistant capital, navigational capital, linguistic capital, familial and aspirational capital to overcome within the context of the pandemic as well as the conditions of their daily lives (Yosso, 2005). As self-defined bosses, The Storytellers demonstrated significant aspirational capital in buying buildings and new homes to grow their businesses in the midst of

the pandemic. Moreover, they represented familial capital as they positioned themselves as mentors, counselors, and othermothers for the next generations. The capitals they employed represent a reserve of internal resources, social competencies, and applied cultural knowledge that empowered the women to resist, survive, and thrive during conditions of community distress. While my findings clearly evidence that The Storytellers embodied Yosso's community cultural wealth model (CCWM) (2005), their narratives suggest the need to extend Yosso's model to include spiritual capital. In describing spiritual capital, I draw inspiration from Gayle's (2011) definition of spirituality. She defined spirituality as,

A living thing that flows through us like water that nourishes our cells and sustains our body; separating spirituality from ourselves and our work is like denying the body of air, water and food that keeps us alive. It is something that exists within the universe ... that is bigger than us, that transcends time and space; that not only connects us to all other living things, but also to our ancestors in another world.... Spirituality cannot be a separate discourse; it must be connected to every part of our lives. (Gayle, 2011, n.p.)

This definition acknowledges the inseparability of an individual's spirituality and her existence. The Storytellers' reliance on their faith allowed them to redefine themselves and their work through the authority of God, rather than through controlling, demeaning images set by white patriarchy. With this, EFN contributes the conception of spiritual capital as an inner resource and transcendent form of agency in which the Black women early child care providers grounded their work and personal lives. I describe spiritual capital as one's ability to connect with their heritage of ancestral wisdom and the authority of higher power, which exists outside of space and time. In identifying with the sovereignty of a higher power—God—individuals can

resist, overcome, and transform the oppression of unjust institutions and unfavorable life circumstances.

My definition aligns with the thoughts of bell hooks (1992) when she described Black female activist spirituality as “a profound unshaken belief in the spiritual power of black people to transform our world and live with integrity and oneness despite oppressive social realities” (p.8). Black women teachers, preachers, healers, activists, and resisters work with skills and power rooted in their collective belief in something bigger than this oppressive world system (hooks, 1992). Accordingly, The Storytellers used their spirituality to transcend racism, sexism, and classism in their daily lives.

The experiences of Black female activists, like my grandmother and The Storytellers, and their use of spirituality to ground themselves and maintain their families and community, are needed to impart cultural knowledge and spiritual capital to the next generation of educators and children. I add spirituality to the notion of cultural wealth because through their spirituality and faith in God, the women navigated the uncertainty of the pandemic and the challenges of their daily lives with a sense of purpose and inner peace knowing “God, it’s in your hands.” This "reclaiming, maintaining, and passing down African traditional spirituality, whether directly from our ancestral homelands or from within the Diaspora, is key to maintaining healthy, vibrant communities into the future" (Wane & Neegan, 2007, p.29). Through the endarkened feminist narrative methodology, my study offers an expansion of current narrative models, to uphold the spiritual and cultural ways of being which are representative of Black women of both the past and present day.

Embodying Endarkened Feminist Narrative

For this examination of cultural knowledge and forms of community capital, The Storytellers' narratives were gathered through my endarkened feminist narrative (EFN) approach. My intent of using EFN within my multiple case study was to honor the sacred yet familiar process of Black women sharing experiential wisdom and cultural knowledge through narratives. Within this process, The Storytellers and inquirer empower each other through the validation of self and expression. EFN combines the narrative process of storytelling (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), the ritual and sacred aspects of endarkened feminist epistemology (Dillard, 2016), and culturally relevant philosophy of community cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005).

In my conception of EFN, I honor language and expression as vehicles of empowerment, for both one's self and the collective. As such, EFN is a methodological choice that embodies reflection as central to Black women's affirmation of herself, her uniqueness, and her humanity. EFN creates a space where Storytellers can share their experiences and explore their motivations and behaviors towards a deeper understanding of themselves and the world. This study highlights the voices of women who have been rendered invisible in dominant society and research.

However, resisting the marginalization of Black women's voices and narratives requires a listener. For Black women Storytellers, another Black woman is most able to connect to the fullness of her story due to shared experiences of racial and gendered oppressions. The EFN approach is intentionally designed to create spaces where Black women inquirers can reflectively study and illuminate the voices of other Black women. Through the empowered act of voicing their truth, the women regain power of their social narratives, shift the effects of social and political injustices, and dismantle unjust power structures (Davis, 2018).

Reflections of the Community Talk

Within the community talk, I observed the principles of EFN fully engage. As an inquirer, there were periods in the conversation when I felt invisible as The Storytellers conversed about different aspects of their work and daily lives. I welcomed this feeling because I was able to step into the role of a participant observer to witness the way each woman connected with the other as individuals and as a collective. In that space, I understood I was, in some respects, an outsider as the only woman who was not a family provider, yet as a Black woman early childhood educator, I was familiar with aspects of their experience. I observed how The Storytellers affirmed each other in their frustrations with regulatory agencies, shared navigational strategies about the grants and loans available for providers during the pandemic, and compared goals for their personal and professional futures. Within this empathic dialogue with another Black woman, The Storytellers reclaimed power through the affirmation of their narrative, experiences, and existence.

Through the EFN approach, my intent was to create a space where The Storytellers could reflect, deeply feel the fullness of their experiences, and express the associated emotions passionately and unapologetically. Their unfolding of emotions was observed as Ms. Sherice and LaToya shared about the loss of their friends, as Ms. Felicia expressed her excitement of her new home, and as they all reminisced about how the childcare field has changed since they first began decades ago. I recognized their stories and interactions as the actualization of “validation of self and expression,” one of the core tenets of EFN.

Culturally Responsive Inquiry through Endarkened Feminist Narrative

I embarked on this journey with intentions rooted in endarkened feminist narrative and culturally relevant research (Tillman, 2002). As discussed in my methodology chapter, this

commitment guided my decisions throughout the data collection and the analysis process. However, certain aspects of my EFN framework developed both during and after the completion of the study. The first truth I gained was that I had a responsibility to be sensitive to The Storytellers' explicit and implicit preferences. While I recognized this as an inherent part of culturally responsive inquiry, I did not realize how crucial this consideration would be in completing the study. My sensitivity to The Storytellers' preferences and comfort levels led me to significantly adapt my original methodological choices. I initially planned to conduct a community talk first, then follow it with individual interviews, a second community talk, and final round of interviews. However, through the preliminary recruitment phone calls, it became increasingly evident that the candidates were more comfortable talking to me individually than meeting with a group of other women. Therefore, I adapted my methods to conduct individual interviews before asking The Storytellers to participate in the community talk.

This modification gave us time to develop a rapport, exchange life stories, and connect before adding the group dynamic. The interview became more of a conversation with The Storytellers, providing an opportunity for me to open myself to their questions as well as ask the questions I had prepared for them. Some of the women asked me about the inspiration behind my study, how the data would be used, and my own background and positionality. With each Storyteller, I shared how I entered the field of early education; and I made my intentions to honor their voice and stories clear from the beginning of our interactions.

In these interactions, I fully engaged in empathic dialogue and intentional listening. Through EFN, Storytellers are given space to reflect and deeply feel the fullness of their experiences. The power of this reflective process was evident in the warm sense of nostalgia in the women's voices as they recalled the details of their journeys in child care. As the women

reflected on their biographies and re-lived key memories, their narratives grew intertextually and more nuanced. At moments in their narratives, The Storytellers' words became visceral with emotion. I noticed the pauses in their speech when I questioned about the quotidian aspect of their lives, which they most likely have never been asked to discuss before. In other moments, The Storytellers' responses came more quickly as if they were eager to relieve themselves of an untold story, saturated with truth and meaning. As an inquirer in EFN, I held my intent on holding the space for the women to express themselves authentically and unapologetically. This intention allowed me to gather rich descriptions of The Storytellers' lived experiences and worldviews.

The second truth I learned about culturally responsive inquiry in the EFN framework is that in this work, the inquirer must move fluidly between roles. Throughout my interactions with The Storytellers, I engaged in various roles: empathic listener, consultant, mentor, and sister-friend. As discussed in the findings, two of The Storytellers shared in-depth accounts of the loss of their loved ones. In LaToya's case, I first learned of her trauma when I called to schedule a second interview with her. In the conversation, LaToya shared with me her experience as she was on the phone with her friend when she was gunned down by the family member. Later, LaToya shared the symptoms of traumatic shock she experienced as she reflected and processed the events of the day. In these moments, I immediately put aside the role of an inquirer and listened as an empathic friend. After one of our interviews, LaToya invited me to get coffee with her because she needed to get out of her space, both physically and emotionally. As an inquirer, rooted in my sense of sisterhood with LaToya, my inclination was to meet with her and be present for the conversation that eventuated.

Similarly, I developed a friendship with Ms. Sherice during the course of this study. After the community talk, I called Ms. Sherice to check in with her emotional state. I suspected she was managing feelings of loneliness after our first interview session when she described the deep loss of her friend. At that time, she invited me to visit her whenever I could. When I called to check on her, she again invited me to share a meal and help her enroll in an upcoming training. Ms. Sherice also expressed she wanted to meet my daughter, Mrs. Margaret's great-granddaughter. I scheduled a time for us to visit and enjoy a meal together at her program.

As we established a relationship of trust throughout the stages of the study, I noticed The Storytellers shared deeper parts of the motivation behind their work, their past experiences, and their dreams for the future. As they shared with me, I grew closer to their journeys and cared more deeply about seeing their goals actualized. This led to a third understanding of culturally responsive inquiry: the work does not end with the completion of the study.

As a part of my design of EFN, as an act of empowering both self and the collective, I asked The Storytellers how I could support them in the next step of their journeys. While some asked for nothing, Anya said it would be helpful to know about any commercial buildings that could be used for her center-based program. In response, I sent an email connecting her to a trusted commercial real estate agent in the community. LaToya expressed she wanted to explore different work in the field of ECE. I helped her revise her resume and develop a cover letter. I then connected her to an administrator of a local childcare agency. Additionally, Ms. Sherice asked for resources to continue her professional development. I emailed her some links to training courses that could be completed virtually, at her own pace. In these simple ways, I was able to use my skills and social networks, to give back into the lives of The Storytellers who shared a significant part of themselves to help me complete my research.

Lastly, I learned that responsive inquiry is as much about being present in The Storyteller's lives, as it is to know when to hold back. As illustrated in Table 4, not all of The Storytellers were able or willing to participate in each part of the study. Although each was invited to participate in the community talk and the second interview for a member check, some Storytellers did not answer my calls at the scheduled interview time; and others expressed they were too tired at the end of the workday to continue the discussion. In these cases, I made it clear that I could be available at their convenience; and I reiterated that it was their choice to not engage further. Whether they chose to continue participating or not, I sent each Storyteller a hand-written thank you note personalized with positive words for the next part of their journeys.

As a central commitment to EFN, the inquirer should be humble and hold "the internal disposition of one who is others-minded." This disposition, in addition to the sense of collectivism and sisterhood, should lead to acts that enhance the life of the other woman. This is rooted in the inquirer's sense of responsibility for the advancement of the Black community (Akbar, 1991; Allen & Bagozzi 2001; Anderson, 1988; Carson, 2009; Collins, 1989, 2000; Nobles, 1991). As one is empowered, it tends to the collective advancement of us all.

Reflections of Endarkened Feminist Narrative

During the course of study, I was given a glimpse into the personal and professional lives of Black women Storytellers across generations and social locations. Throughout the individual interviews and community talk, we as a group of Black women shared heart-felt laughs, mourned the loss of loved ones, and prayed for each other. With some of The Storytellers, I developed a familial connection that extends beyond traditional definitions of sisterhood.

At the core of this inquiry journey was my commitment to the principles of endarkened feminist narrative (EFN). Within the EFN framework, I call for an end to the research paradigm

where a researcher engages with a participant or community as a “unit of study.” These engagements perpetuate inequitable power dynamics and distance the researcher from the humanity of the participant as an individual. Instead, in EFN, the inquirer should ask what do I have to give and how can I be open to transformation through this process?

Through this mindset, I connected with new aspects of my heritage as a Black women educator. In many ways, I felt validated in the ways I think and engage with the world, as I realized my dispositions are part of a larger pool of collective experiences and cultural knowledge. Listening to the experiences of seasoned Storytellers and studying the history of Black women educators gave me a deeper appreciation for the resilience, contributions, and innovation of Black womanhood. As I immersed myself in the stories of Black women, past and present, I noticed my disposition towards other Black women outside of the study became more empathic and inquiry-based— I wanted to connect with them and learn their stories as well. By applying the EFN framework to my research and daily interactions with Black women, I have re-rooted myself in my womanhood, my motherhood, my Blackness, and my humanity. I consider this re-humanization of the inquiry process the deepest transformation of the EFN framework.

Transformation for The Storyteller comes from engaging in empathic dialogue with another Black woman. It is a chance to speak her truth, reflect on the fullness of her experience, and express the associated emotions. Through the act of reflectively sharing her narrative, The Storyteller reclaims her power through the validation of her perspective, experiences, and existence. For the inquirer, transformation comes through the process of empathic listening. The exercise of empathy builds our capacity for compassion and responsiveness as we wholeheartedly seek to understand the world through the other’s eyes. When we embrace the fullness and complexity of the other’s positionality, we can connect to the familiarity of their experience.

By listening to their narratives with humility, a sense of interdependency, and a willingness to expand our perspective, we can connect to the humanity of the individual.

With the framework of EFN, we are Black women inquirers engaging with Black women from other social locations. We have the commonality of our Blackness and womanhood to connect us. Because of our similarities and shared experiences, we can more easily relinquish the constructs that divide us—class, education level, socio-economic status, age, religion, sexual preference, etc. Instead, as Black women, we connect through our sameness and practice validating and uplifting the other.

The gift and challenge of EFN is in grounding one's self in the human experience through our narratives so this disposition can be transferred to interactions with others outside of one's group of preference or familiarity. By first engaging with women who look like us and can validate our expression and ways of being, we are empowered and regenerated. This energy enables us to reengage with the rest of the world, even those who do not look, think, or act like us. By endowing ourselves with the energy from empathic dialogue with other Black women, we can more easily transfer the skill of human connection to others. We can more easily build tolerance, resiliency, and compassion for engaging with "others" when we ground ourselves in the knowledge that everyone holds their own stories. We can engage with people from an understanding that everyone carries a heritage, narrative, and life experiences that have formed their funds of knowledge, worldview, and ways of being.

As Black women inquirers, scholars, educators, and activists rooted in our cultural knowledge and fortified through empathy and compassion, we operate in the fullness of our power. Therefore, when confronted with ignorance, bigotry, and hatred based in notions of race, gender, and class, we do not waste energy attacking other humans who act from their own

experiences and funds of knowledge. Instead we focus our attention to address the hegemonic systems that perpetuate inequity and injustice.

Implications

My study holds implications for state governing agencies and for empowering the profession of early childhood education (ECE) as a whole. For state governing agencies, first, I urge policymakers and legislators to reconceptualize the quality assessment of family childcare providers by policymakers, QRIS programs, and other regulatory agencies. In this, I advocate for a more culturally responsive community-based rating system that champions the voices and values of parents, families, and other community-sanctioned vehicles for the definition of quality in early childhood education. Second, I encourage state governing agencies and policymakers to examine the structures in place to support and protect the care professionals who serve our youngest citizens. Within these implications, I encourage a critical review of the way Black women early childhood educators' cultural knowledge is represented in education reform and policy.

Reconceptualizing Quality Assessment

In the field of early childhood education, the silencing of Black women's voices and the disregarding of their intellectual thought is evident in teacher education programs' persistence in highlighting white child development theorists while minimizing the contributions of Educators of Color and critical theorists. Furthermore, the narratives within this study illustrate how The Storytellers' pedagogical autonomy and intellectual thought were opposed through managerial professionalism enforced by representatives of state agencies. These factors encumber BWECEs' agency in developing meaningful pedagogical practices that meet the individual child's personal, sociocultural, linguistic, and developmental capabilities as well as the families' cultural values

(Brown, 2009; Brown & Barry, 2019). Still, The Storytellers opposed the taken-for-granted assumptions that white middle-class ECE holds about teaching, learning, childhood, and curriculum. They cared for children according to the values of the parents of their programs and their own program policies (i.e., Ms. Tara's Christian principles and Sunni's lingo-cultural philosophies).

My work aligns with that of Soto (2002) and other critical theorists who challenge the way wealth, privilege, and power in education have valorized the rationalistic Western lens and disregarded other perspectives. The representation of diverse voices of Black women early family care providers, is a crucial step in their recognition as indispensable members of the early childhood community. As such, their voices must be heard throughout policy and decision-making around issues of pedagogy, practice, equity, and social justice within the field of ECE. It is time for a critical shift in the conversations towards the recognition of marginalized perspectives and the disregarded intellectual contribution of Black women early educators. In amplifying Black women's voices and forms of knowledge, they can contribute to a larger pool of practices and more readily address the diverse and dynamic needs of young learners.

I advocate for a re-assessment of what constitutes meaningful knowledge and essential education. In this reconceptualization, QRIS programs and other evaluation measurements should account for the relevance of educators' backgrounds and their cultural congruence with children, families, and their communities. Additionally, to reassess the valued forms of professional knowledge, program and teacher evaluation systems and education programs should account for and preference the experiential knowledge and cultural wisdom valued by the families and communities served, rather than placing heavy emphasis on formal education. Within teacher education programs, this reconceptualization would allow early educators to earn

credits for demonstrating competencies based on their previous child care experience. In quality rating and improvement systems, this would take the form a community evaluation process in which raters rely on the judgment of the families and other community-based stakeholders to assess and verify the quality of the educator.

This reconceptualist approach of community evaluation has been preferred by Scholars of Color dedicated to a more culturally responsive assessment of “good teachers” (Foster, 1993; Irvine, 1990; Lipman, 1998). Reconceptualists believe that curriculum and what defines a good teacher should be of children, their families, communities, and their culturally-developed ways of knowing (Mueller & Whyte, 2019). Although the local QRIS incorporates a parent survey as part of their evaluation and rating process, the survey limits families to answering questions based on how well the program aligns with the standards set by the QRIS. However, a true commitment to the community and families’ voices would allow the families agency to determine what curriculum, values, and practices are important to them and how the program meets these standards. Accordingly, this family- and community-based evaluation process would preference the cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) of providers, children, and their families rather than the standardized measurements set by legislators and policymakers.

Structures to Support and Protect Childcare Providers

The worldwide health crisis highlighted many gaps in the American health care system. Many family childcare providers were among the group of 27.5 million Americans who had no health insurance before the COVID-19 pandemic (Frazze, 2020). As such, The Storytellers risked their health and well-being daily to care for the children of essential workers. Ms. Tara expressed her apprehension of serving in family childcare where “you're in small quarters.” Yet, she felt there was little choice as she realized parents could easily take their children to a

different program and not return. Considering the risk of losing her business, Ms. Tara continued her work in serving the children of essential workers. Yet, she explained,

With children being asymptomatic a lot of times, you don't know what they have. You don't know what they're carrying. They may have the antibody; you don't even know it. That's how these schoolteachers are getting sick, because somebody's giving it to them... *Somebody*. We can't be naive about that.

Although The Storytellers described how they screened the children of the program for symptoms of COVID and some even took temperatures on a daily basis, Ms. Tara's fear was substantiated by the CDC,

Symptom screenings are not helpful in identifying individuals with SARS-CoV-2 [the virus that causes COVID-19] infection who are asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic (they have not developed signs or symptoms yet but will later). Others may have symptoms that are so mild, they may not notice them. In fact, children are more likely than adults to be asymptomatic or to have only mild symptoms. (Screening K-12 Students, n.p.)

In short, it was all but impossible for FCPs to know if they were being exposed to the virus because children are not likely to show symptoms in the first place.

The daily health risk that providers faced in caring for the community's children brings me to my second implication for the state and federal government. To protect providers like Ms. Tara, who has pre-existing medical conditions, and Anya, who has to wait for open enrollment to apply for governmental insurance, this study affirms the need for a more effective support system to protect self-employed family childcare providers. During the pandemic, childcare providers could apply to receive hazard pay equivalent to \$5 per hour for the time worked during specific weeks. However, not all providers were aware of this provision. Moreover, although it

was offered twice throughout the pandemic, the lump sum (based on the number of children and employees in the program) does not address the consistent lack of accessible health care and health insurance many FCPs face.

During the worldwide health crisis, the women care providers who were called upon to keep the nation's parents at work were among those who were least protected. Many of them had no more than their faith and bleach wipes to safeguard them in the case they were exposed to the virus. As Anya stated, "I hate not having insurance right now. I just pray that my health stays in a good shape for right now." The women providing the "critical service" of caring for the nation's youngest citizens deserve more than a prayer to protect them against the significant financial and health risk of contracting the virus.

The federal government suggested that people who feel they may be experiencing symptoms and need advice on whether they need to get tested for coronavirus should talk to their primary care physician. However, uninsured childcare providers and others who are uninsured tend not to have a primary care physician (Frazee, 2020). While they may have the option to go to clinics or other facilities that help the uninsured, the nation's health care providers advised individuals showing symptoms of the virus to stay away from clinics or emergency departments, "unless they have been advised to come in, or are having a medical emergency like severe difficulty breathing" (Frazee, 2020, n.p.). If providers like Ms. Tara or her daughter with chronic asthma wait for a "medical emergency like severe difficulty breathing" to receive medical attention, it may already be too late.

Moreover, while the federal government made a new law, which makes coronavirus testing free for patients without insurance, it did not cover treatment related to the virus. In short, The Storytellers and other uninsured childcare providers remain amongst the most vulnerable

populations for two reasons. First, FCPs risk exposure to the virus by caring for children of essential workers who work in frontline jobs that increase their probability of being exposed to the virus. Second, because they are poorly compensated for their work, FCPs are less likely to have quality health insurance that will support them in the case that they contract the virus. The structures needed to support FCPs include quality health insurance that will cover the cost of COVID-19 treatment (not just testing), as well as a sustainable option that will provide accessible, quality health care even throughout the end of the pandemic.

Limitations

While this study on Black women FCPs offers significant insight on the daily challenges of family childcare and how the women reacted to the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was still met with certain limitations. A major limitation of this study was related to the constraints of time. This limitation manifested in three ways throughout this work. First, I was limited in the amount of time I was able to spend with the individual Storytellers due to the conditions of the pandemic. In my original proposal for my work with the FCPs, I planned to perform a series of interviews, a focus group, and an observation of the FCPs within their program. An observation through a program visit would have brought me deeper into their world, allowing me to write in more detail about the manifestation of their cultural knowledge and how the FCPs engaged the children and families of their program. However, due to conditions of the pandemic, the research had to be conducted virtually; therefore, I was not able to conduct this final observation, that would have helped in the triangulation of the data.

Second, time to complete the work within the window of my dissertation was a factor. Black women early educators and Black FCPs are highly underrepresented in educational literature (Boutte, & Strickland, 2008; Tuominen, 2003). Therefore, there is much to be learned

about the daily lives of the women who serve children and families of the urban Black community. Spending more time with The Storytellers through an ethnographic study would have offered a comprehensive demonstration of their cultural knowledge in action. Through an ethnographic study, rather than limited interviews and a community talk, I would be able to observe and interact with The Storytellers in the real-life environment of their programs to gather a detailed account their daily lives. Because of the constraints of the pandemic, I was not in the position to conduct a more time-intensive ethnography.

Finally, the study was affected by time based on the nature of the family childcare providers' various identities. Due to their interlocking identities as businesswomen, mothers, and care providers, The Storytellers had various obligations vying for their time and attention. Some of the interviews were scheduled during their work hours when children were present and needed their attentiveness. As a responsive inquirer and an experienced BWECE, I felt obligated to expedite the interview process to allow The Storyteller to return to her duties of child care. Relatedly, some of The Storytellers scheduled their interviews after hours when they would usually begin to relax after the demands of the workday. Others had to attend to the needs of their biological children. Again, I was sensitive to these commitments and intentional not to take more time than necessary.

Beyond time, another limitation of this research was the number of study participants. Because it was a case study, the number of participants was appropriate (Fugard & Potts, 2015; Guest, et al., 2006). However, a major intention of my work and the EFN approach is to develop kinship and networks among The Storytellers. While it was evident The Storytellers in the community talk connected and grew their network with the other FCPs, I would have liked to offer them more opportunities to meet with additional Black women FCPs.

Further Study

There are various implications related to the study of how Black women family childcare providers reacted to support their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. However, due to the gross underrepresentation of Black women family childcare providers in educational research (Boutte, & Strickland, 2008; Tuominen, 2003), there are numerous aspects of FCPs' work and daily lives that warrant further study outside of the context of the pandemic. In addition, there is much to be explored in the way FCPs and the childcare industry were impacted in regard to the aftermath of the pandemic.

For example, further insight could be gained in understanding how Black women care providers in center-based programs around the city supported essential families through their work. Center-based program administrators served larger numbers of children and families, had to account for the additional expenses of working from a facility outside of their homes, and had to consider the needs of teaching staff and other paid personnel. As a result, center-based BWECEs assumedly had more to consider in making the decision to remain open during the pandemic.

Also, in chapter three I discussed how The Storytellers for this study were chosen from a list of family providers in four specific zip codes. Of the one hundred programs I called in the area, only 33 indicated they were open for service. This suggests that about two-thirds of FCPs in the area closed either temporarily or permanently during the pandemic. It would be interesting to learn what factors contributed to the closing of so many programs. One could speculate it was a combination of low enrollment, financial struggles, and the health risk of contracting the virus. However, these are only assumptions without quality research to answer these questions.

A related population, whose stories would add to a more holistic understanding of the impact of the pandemic on the childcare industry, are providers who serve “private pay” families. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the state and local government focused support efforts on programs that served low-income families who depended on government subsidized childcare. Important to consider, are the providers who choose to serve predominantly “private pay” families—those who pay out-of-pocket for childcare services. Learning how these providers were impacted by the pandemic, the increased unemployment rates within the community, and the lack of substantial government support would contribute to a better understanding of the impact of the pandemic and how these providers can be supported in the future.

This study focused on how the pandemic affected family childcare providers and BWECs within their community work. Yet, one cannot disregard the fact that the communities they serve consist of individual families. Therefore, in understanding the full effects of the pandemic on community childcare, it is imperative to hear the voices of the families in the community. Black families’ adaptation to the various changes brought by the pandemic was briefly discussed by Ms. Tara when she stated, “I think some families are extremely frustrated. They're frustrated because a lot is falling on the mothers.” She described her concern for working mothers who struggled to maintain their households and various other responsibilities, while supporting their children in virtual schooling. Ms. Tara believed that many mothers brought their children to the program because they felt the students would be better supported by the providers than what could be offered at home. However, until we hear the stories of the mothers, fathers, and family members who did not have the option of staying at home during the worldwide health crisis, we can only speculate their perspectives.

Finally, while the COVID-19 pandemic was a significant source of stress during the summer of 2020, there was intersectional hardship in the Black community due to a surge of racial tension and civil unrest. Freedom fighters around the globe rallied to protest police brutality and the murders of George Floyd (1973-2020), Breonna Taylor (1993-2020), and scores of Black men, women, and children who suffered at the hands of those who swore to protect and serve. The push for Black liberation from state-inflicted violence evolved into one of the most influential social movements of the post-civil rights era in the summer of 2020 (Roberts, 2020). No part of the Black community was immune to the cumulative effects of psychological, emotional, and spiritual trauma caused by the persistent criminalization, defamation, and dehumanization of Black Americans.

Race-related stress (Szymanski & Lewis, 2015) has a significant impact on members of Communities of Color. Moreover, research illustrates the deleterious effects of race-based trauma and toxic stress on children's cognitive development, physical health, and psychological well-being (Walkley & Cox, 2013). Therefore, the field of ECE would benefit greatly from research on how BWECs nurtured Black children's academic, psychological, and emotional needs while withstanding conditions of the pandemic as it intersected with an historic period of civil unrest.

Final Thoughts

This multiple case study emphasizes the voices of Black women early care and education professionals within regulated family childcare programs as they adapted their roles as care providers, small business owners, and community mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Storytellers shared meaningful aspects of their everyday experiences through interviews and a

community talk. Their common, taken-for-granted knowledge (Collins, 2002) was woven into these conversations and formed the basis for my understanding of their cultural knowledge.

Generations of Black women care providers and community mothers, such as my grandmother and The Storytellers represented in this study, have rooted themselves in spirituality and self-determination to resist, navigate, and transform community hardship and uplift the Black community. Establishing themselves through self-definition, Black women persist against external hostilities by creating spaces to process, support, and confide with other Black women. As such, inquiry within endarkened feminist narrative allows Black women inquirers and Storytellers to honor their wisdom, spirituality, and cultural knowledge through sharing unique and powerful counternarratives.

Although the analysis of their narratives constituted the findings of my work, with further reflection, I ultimately realized the pillars of The Storytellers' cultural knowledge (faith, education, and community advancement) were not novel principles. Instead, they echoed the same values, wisdom, and tacit understandings instilled in me by my grandmother, and then my mother. In The Storytellers' narratives, I perceived the same cultural knowledge I now convey to my own daughter as a fundamental code of living.

The examination of The Storytellers' experiences and perspectives lead to the substantiation of my worldview and an understanding of myself as a conduit of Black women's collective knowledge and ancestral wisdom. Endarkened feminist narrative provided the framework of sacred praxis and spiritual reflection needed to honor The Storytellers' narratives. Consequently, I was transformed through my inquiry process. In studying The Storytellers' interlocking identities and various roles in the community, I recognized the multidimensionality of the identities I carry as a mother, wife, daughter, sister, friend, othermother, professional,

scholar, and educator. I listened to The Storytellers discuss the love, guidance, protection, and values they imparted to their daughters. Their experiences of Black motherhood reflected the ways I teach my own daughter to honor her spirituality, apply her intellect, recognize her beauty, and know her strength and value.

The illumination of my connection to The Storytellers' narratives was an effect of the reflective and transformative process that involves awakening to aspects of one's spiritual being that cannot be discerned through the natural senses. This understanding aligns with my intent of endarkened feminist narrative as I wrote, "In intention, the inquirer seeks a deeper understanding of not only the other woman, but of herself as a descendant of Black legacy." Within this process, the inquirer searches for truths about her heritage that help her see herself more clearly. Out of this reflection, I realized that I too share The Storytellers' cultural knowledge and epistemic heritage as a Black woman early childhood educator. In recognizing this aspect of my identity, I realigned myself with a fundamental element of my Black heritage.

I end this reflection with a memory of my grandmother's homegoing celebration. An hour before the service began, the church was filled with mourning mothers, fathers, and children who overflowed into the vestibule. They all arrived to pay their respects to the woman they knew as Maggie, Ms. Margaret, Granny, and mama. I watched as a line of people—young, old, Black, white, men, and women— unapologetically wept as they waited for their chance to share their memories of Ms. Margret with my mother who stood in the front row.

The mourners represented generations of children who grew up under my grandmother's care during her 40 years of service in the local church and community. As they took turns embracing my mother, some reminisced of their time with Ms. Margaret in Sunday school or in the "Good News Club" children's Bible study she led from her home over 30 years ago. Others

told of how Ms. Margaret gave them money for food and household appliances, paid their rent, and even school tuitions. Each disclosed that she asked them not to tell of these gifts, but now they felt her passing released them from this promise. Numerous mothers spoke of how she gave them spiritual guidance, motherly counsel, and shared the love of God with them. Doctors and nurses testified the tender care and kindness she showed patients during her years as a licensed practical nurse. Still others referred to her as “Mother Roberson,” recalling how my grandmother took them into her home after they came upon hard times. Finally, the choir stood to signify the beginning of the service. The congregation joined them in singing my grandmother’s favorite hymn, *“If when you give the best of your service, telling the world that the Savior is come; Be not dismayed when men don't believe you; He understands; he'll say, ‘Well done.’”*

As I complete this work ten years after my grandmother’s passing, her story exemplifies the power of a Black woman who answered her calling to serve. Through her lifetime of care work, my grandmother, Margaret V. Roberson (1938-2010), influenced countless mothers, fathers, children, and educators. Her passion lives on through her thriving childcare business. Her memory remains in the spirits of her children and grandchildren, and her legacy continues through the next generation of Black women educators, care providers, and community mothers.

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APPENDIX A IRB Approval



Department of University Safety & Assurances

Melody Harries
IRB Administrator
Institutional Review Board
Engelmann 270
P. O. Box 413
Milwaukee, WI 53201-0413
414-662-3544

New Study - Notice of IRB Exempt Status

Date: July 21, 2020

uwm.edu/irb
harries@uwm.edu

To: Leanne Evans
Dept: Teaching and Learning

CC: Crystasany Turner

IRB #: 21.027

Title: Black Women Family Childcare Providers' Roles as Community Mothers During the COVID-19 Pandemic

After review of your research protocol by the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Institutional Review Board, your protocol has been granted Exempt Status under **Category 2** as governed by 45 CFR 46.104(d).

This protocol has been approved as exempt for three years and IRB approval will expire on **July 20, 2023**. Before the expiration date, you will receive an email explaining how to either keep the study open or close it. If the study is completed before the expiration date, you may notify the IRB by sending an email to irbinfo@uwm.edu with the study number and the status.

Any proposed changes to the protocol must be reviewed by the IRB before implementation, unless the change is specifically necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. You are responsible for adhering to the policies and guidelines set forth by the UWM IRB, maintaining proper documentation of study records and promptly reporting to the IRB any adverse events which require reporting. You are also responsible for ensuring that all study staff receive appropriate training in the ethical guidelines of conducting human subjects research.

You must also adhere to UWM and UW System Policies, and any applicable state and federal laws governing activities which are independent of IRB review/approval (e.g., [FERPA](#), [Radiation Safety](#), [UWM Data Security](#), [UW System policy on Prizes, Awards and Gifts](#), state gambling laws, etc.). When conducting research at institutions outside of UWM, be sure to obtain permission and/or approval as required by their policies.

Contact the IRB office if you have any further questions. Thank you for your cooperation, and best wishes for a successful project.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melody Harries".

Melody Harries
IRB Administrator

APPENDIX B
Family Child Care Providers in Top 4 Black Populated Zip Codes

Program Number	Star Level	Registration Status	Open?	Accepting Children?	Zip Code #
1.	4	Certified	No "due to COVID"		1
2.	3	Licensed	No	Yes	1
3.	3	Licensed	No Answer		1
4.	3	Licensed	No Answer		1
5.	3	Certified	No Answer		1
6.	3	Licensed	Yes	Yes, Depending on the hours	1
7.	3	Certified	Yes	No- Due to COVID	1
8.	3	Licensed	Yes	Yes	1
9.	2	Licensed	Not open until June 2020	No-Due to COVID	1
10.	2	Certified	No Answer		1
11.	2	Licensed	No Answer		1
12.	2	Certified	No Answer		1
13.	2	Licensed	No Answer		1
14.	2	Licensed	No Answer		1
15.	3	Licensed	No Answer		1
16.	2	Licensed	No Answer		1
17.	2	Certified	No Answer		1
18.	2	Licensed	No Answer		1

19.	2	Licensed	No answer		1
20.	2	Licensed	Busy signal		1
21.	2	Licensed	No Answer		1
22.	2	Certified	Phone is off		1
23.	2	Certified	No Answer		1
24.	2	Certified	No Answer		1
25.	2	Certified	phone is off		1
26.	2	Licensed	Yes	Yes	1
27.	2	Licensed	Yes	No	1
28.	2	Certified	No "Due to COVID"		1
29.	2	Certified	No Answer		1
30.	2	Licensed	Phone is off		1
31.	2	Licensed	Yes	No	1
32.	2	Licensed	No Answer		1
33.	2	Certified	No Answer		1
34.	1	Cerified	No Answer		1
35.	1	Licensed	No Answer		1
36.	Participating But Not Yet Rated	Licensed	Yes	Yes	1
37.	Participating But Not Yet Rated	Licensed	Yes	Yes	1

38.	Participating But Not Yet Rated	Licensed	Phone is off		1
39.	Participating But Not Yet Rated	Licensed	No Answer		1
40.	Participating But Not Yet Rated	Licensed	Yes	Yes	1
41.	Participating But Not Yet Rated	Certified	Yes	No	1
42.	Participating But Not Yet Rated	Certified	Yes	Yes	1
43.	Participating But Not Yet Rated	Licensed	Yes	Yes	1
44.	Not Participating	Certified	Phone is off		1
45.	4	Licensed	No Answer		2
46.	3	Licensed	No Answer		2
47.	3	Licensed	No Answer		2
48.	3	Licensed	No Answer		2
49.	3	Certified	No Answer		2
50.	2	Licensed	No Answer		2
51.	2	Licensed	Yes	Yes	2
52.	2	Licensed	No Answer		2
53.	2	Certified	Yes	Yes	2
54.	2	Licensed	No Answer		2
55.	5	Licensed	Yes	No	2
56.	5	Licensed	Yes	Yes	3
57.	4	Licensed	No Answer		3
58.	4	Licensed	No Answer		3
59.	4	Licensed	Yes	Yes	3
60.	3	Licensed	Yes	Yes	3
61.	3	Licensed	No Answer		3
62.	3	Licensed	Yes	Yes	3
63.	3	Licensed	No Answer		3
64.	3	Licensed	No Answer		3

65.	3	Certified	Yes	No- a child in the program had a heart transplant— “wants to avoid any risk”	3
66.	3	Licensed	No Answer		3
67.	3	Licensed	No Answer		3
68.	3	Licensed	No Answer		3
69.	3	Licensed	Yes	Yes	3
70.	3	Licensed	No Answer		3
71.	3	Licensed	Yes	Yes	3
72.	3	Licensed	Yes	Yes	3
73.	2	Licensed	No Not open until July 2020		3
74.	2	Licensed	No Answer		3
75.	2	Certified	Not open for June 2020		3
76.	2	Certified	No Answer		3
77.	2	Licensed	No Answer		3
78.	2	Licensed	Yes	NO	3
79.	1	Licensed	No Answer		3
80.	Participating But Not Yet Rated	Certified	No Answer		3
81.	Participating But Not Yet Rated	Certified	No Answer		3
82.	Participating But Not Yet Rated	Certified	Yes	Yes	3

83.	Not Participating	Certified	No Answer		3
84.	Not Participating	Certified	No	No	3
85.	Not Participating	Certified	No Answer		3
86.	Participating But Not Yet Rated	Certified	No Answer		2
87.	Not Participating	Certified	Wrong number		2
88.	4	Licensed	No Answer		4
89.	4	Licensed	Yes	Yes	4
90.	4	Licensed	Yes	No	4
91.	3	Licensed	No Answer		4
92.	3	Licensed	Yes	Yes	4
93.	3	Licensed	Yes	Yes	4
94.	3	Certified	Yes	Yes, for hours 4pm-10pm	4
95.	3	Licensed	No Answer		4
96.	3	Certified	Yes	Yes for 3:30pm-10pm	4
97.	3	Licensed	Yes	Yes	4
98.	3	Licensed	No Answer		4
99.	3	Licensed	No Answer		4
100.	3	Licensed	Yes	Yes	4

APPENDIX C



Crystasany R. Turner, M.S.
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Urban Education: Curriculum and Instruction
CRTurner@uwm.edu
262.352.7500

Esteemed Childcare Administrator,

I am Crystasany R. Turner, a Doctoral Student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee studying Urban Education with a focus in Early Childhood Education. I am exploring the way Black women family childcare providers have adapted to the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic in support of the children and families of the Milwaukee community. To help with this work, I invite you to **participate in a 90-minute community talk** where Black women family childcare providers in the Milwaukee community will network and share stories about how they responded and organized to maintain their business, families, and communities during these trying times. Participants must fit the following characteristics:

- Identify as an African American or Black female
- Served Black children between the ages of birth and four years during a portion or all of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.
- Work in a family childcare center within the city of Milwaukee

Participation is voluntary, and all comments and information (personal and program) will remain confidential. This information will only be used to understand the perceptions and experiences of the group. After completing the community talk, participants will be invited to partake in a voluntary interview to further express their feelings around the topic. However, participants may choose to engage in the community talk without completing the subsequent interviews or vice versa. After all sessions complete, participant will be sent the initial findings to verify the accurate interpretation of their views, feelings, and experiences.

Please respond within two weeks of receiving this letter using the provided envelope. Upon receipt, I will contact each participant to discuss the details of the meeting time and place.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to network with other early childhood professionals and contribute your experience and perspectives to this important work.

Sincerely,

Crystasany R. Turner, MS
UW-Milwaukee

APPENDIX D
Phone Demographic Questionnaire Script
for candidates who responded to mailing

Hello this is Crystasany Turner from Roberson's Kiddie Lane Day Care, completing a study for my doctoral work at UW-Milwaukee. Thank you for your interest in participating in my study on Black women family childcare providers during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am calling to ask you some brief questions as well as answer any questions you may have about what your participation may entail. My questions center on the criteria that were established for my study.

Demographic Information:

- Do you identify as a Black woman?
- Are you currently working as a family/ in-home childcare provider within the Black community?
- How many years have you served in this capacity?

If the candidate matches the criteria of the study, I will proceed to review the study Consent Form.

Information about the study:

- There will be no more than 5 other Black women in the community talk besides myself.
- If you choose to participate in all aspects of the study, it will be about a 5-hour commitment. You may choose to engage in the community talk without completing the subsequent interviews or vice versa.
- All names and identifiers will be de-identified to protect the confidentiality of the participants.
- You will be audio-video recorded on Zoom, but only your audio responses will be used for transcribing purposes.
- Once the recording is transcribed, a pseudonym will be used to protect the anonymity of you and your program.
- You will be compensated \$10/hour up to \$50 for your time.

Risks:

- There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation.

Benefits:

- Contributing to a study that prioritizes the stories of Black women in the field of early education.
- Networking and sharing stories and strategies with other Black women family childcare providers.

Do you have any questions?

I will send you a consent form that will re-iterate what I just went over with you. You do not need to sign it, as your participation in the study will indicate your consent. Thank you.

APPENDIX E

Phone Recruitment Script

for candidates who did not respond to mailing

Hello this is Crystasany Turner, from Roberson's Kiddie Lane Day Care. I am following up with you regarding a mailing I sent a few weeks ago inviting you to participate in my study on Black women family childcare providers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Is this a good time to talk? Are there any questions I can answer for you regarding this work?

If candidate wants more information; review the consent form and follow the protocol for candidates who responded.

If the candidate expresses she is still not interested: "Thank you for your time. You can contact me at 262.352.7500 if you have any further inquiries."

APPENDIX F

Original Interview Protocol #1

- 1) Please tell me about how you decided to become a family care provider.
- 2) Describe what you enjoy more about your work
- 3) How would you describe the families you serve in your program?
- 4) What do you think is most important about your work with the children and families?
- 5) What does it mean to you to be a Black woman caring for and educating young Black children?
- 6) What advice would you give another young woman looking to enter the field of ECE?
- 7) How would you describe your role within your community as an FCP?
- 8) Were you or someone close to you affected the pandemic? If so, how?
 - a) Were your family members quarantined in your home while you were caring for the children?
 - b) What precautions did you take to protect your family?
- 9) Describe what it means to be essential during these times?
 - a) Do you consider your work/ role essential? Why or why not?
- 10) Describe your overall experience serving your community during the pandemic?
 - a) Were there any changes in enrollment?
 - b) Did you gain a new perspective the community, society, the children and families in your care?
- 11) Is there anything you would like to add that you feel is pertinent to the study?

APPENDIX G

Original Community Talk Protocol

The purpose of this community talk is for Black women family childcare providers to share their experiences around caring for Black children and families throughout the pandemic.

Inquirer Notes:

- For research purposes this discussion will be RECORDED.
- Acknowledge CONFIDENTIALITY (individuals are de-identified)
- A climate of RESPECT and TRUST (comfortable and safe environment for all participants)

INTRODUCTIONS:

- First names
- Years in the field
- Program and age-group they work with

QUESTIONS:

1. How and when did you learn about the pandemic?
 - a. What were your initial thoughts/ responses?
 - b. How and when did you learn about the quarantine?
2. How were you informed that childcare providers were requested to remain open to serve essential workers?
 - a. What were your initial thoughts when you learned that childcare providers were requested to remain open?
3. What factors contributed to your decision to remain open?
 - a. Did you ever close? If so, how long?
 - b. What factors influenced you to stay open or re-open?
4. What has been your experience serving your children and families during the pandemic?
5. Have you experienced any challenges or barriers while serving families in your program during the pandemic?
 - a. How did you navigate or overcome these challenges? What resources or networks did you use?
 - b. Do you feel there could have been more resources provided?
6. Were you made aware of any changes in policies or licensing regulations?
7. Did you reach out to other providers or develop any new connections that helped you during the pandemic? If so who/ how?
 - a. How did these connections assist your work during the pandemic?

CLOSING: Thank you for your time and stories.

APPENDIX H

Revised Interview Protocol

The purpose of this study is to better understand Black women family childcare providers' experiences around caring for Black children and families throughout the pandemic.

Inquirer Notes:

- For research purposes this discussion will be RECORDED.

INTRODUCTIONS:

- First names
- Years in the field
- Program and age-group they work with

Please tell me about why you decided to become a family care provider.

- 1) What do you think is most important about your work with the children and families?
- 2) What does it mean to you to be a Black woman caring for and educating young Black children?
- 3) How would you describe your role within your community as an FCP?
- 4) How were you most affected the pandemic?
 - a) What precautions did you take to protect your family?
- 5) Describe your overall experience serving your community during the pandemic?
 - a) Were there any changes in enrollment?
 - b) Did you gain a new perspective the community, society, the children and families in your care?
- 6) How and when did you learn about the pandemic?
- 7) How were you informed that childcare providers were requested to remain open to serve essential workers?
 - a) What were your initial thoughts when you learned that childcare providers were requested to remain open?
- 8) What factors contributed to your decision to remain open?
- 9) What has been your experience serving your children and families during the pandemic?
 - a) Describe some of the challenges or barriers you faced while serving the families in your program during the pandemic?
 - b) How did you navigate or overcome these challenges? What resources or networks did you use?
- 10) Do you feel supported in any way? (DCF, other agencies)
- 11) Did you reach out to other providers or develop any new connections that helped you during the pandemic? If so who/ how?
- 12) Do you consider your work/ role essential? Why or why not?
- 13) Is there anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX I

Revised Community Talk Protocol

The purpose of this community talk is for Black women family childcare providers to share their experiences around caring for Black children and families throughout the pandemic.

Inquirer Notes:

- For research purposes this discussion will be RECORDED.
- Acknowledge CONFIDENTIALITY (individuals are de-identified)
- A climate of RESPECT and TRUST (comfortable and safe environment for all participants)

INTRODUCTIONS:

- First names
- Years in the field
- Program and age-group they work with

QUESTIONS:

- 1) Please describe your experiences over the last few months during the pandemic
 - a) What has changed for you?
 - b) How have you navigated these changes?
- 2) What are changes you have seen in the childcare field as a result of the conditions of the pandemic?
 - a) Have you been affected by the changes in DCF policies? If so, how?
 - b) What resources have you used to learn about and navigate these changes?
- 3) How have the families and children of your program been affected by the conditions of the pandemic?
- 4) If you were to make a list of suggestions to DCF and other governing agencies on how they could support family childcare providers at this time, what would you suggest?
- 5) What is your perspective on the civil unrest and the community protests?
- 6) Do you anticipate any changes in the community in the aftermath of the pandemic and the civil unrest?
 - a) How have you adapted in your role as an FCP changed?
- 7) Have you noticed any positive changes during this time period?
- 8) What do you hope happens as result of this time period?
- 9) Who/what has supported you or been a source of strength during this time period?

APPENDIX J

Interview Protocol #2

The second interview will follow up on conversations from the community talk

- 1) Can you describe your experience/ feelings while participating the in the community talk?
 - a) What did you find interesting or helpful in the community talk session?
 - b) How does talking to other FCPs support your work?
- 2) Tell me more about your experience with _____.
- 3) You mentioned _____, can you explain more how that informed your understanding of _____.
- 4) What can be learned from the experience family care providers in the context of living wage and compensation for your work?

APPENDIX K

Member Checking Protocol

1. All Storytellers will be offered the option to perform a member check of the transcript data. This will happen after the transcripts for all community talks and interviews are collected and edited. This process will be facilitated by Crystasany Turner.
2. Within the recruitment letter, Storyteller candidates will be informed of the option to member check to verify the accuracy of the interpretations of their views, feelings, and experiences expressed in the community talk and individual interviews.
3. On the consent form, participants will be asked to indicate their choice (hard copies or electronic copies) on how to receive the member checking materials. Participants may also request another Zoom meeting to complete the member checking with Crystasany Turner.
4. The member check materials (initial notes, patterns, and themes) will be emailed to each respective Storyteller in separate, personalized emails (or physical documents).
5. The member check email (or mailing) will include the following questions to guide the participant in the review:
 1. Do the summaries accurately reflect your views, feelings, and experiences?
 2. If you do not feel your views, feelings and experiences are accurately reflected, please explain what you feel should be changed/added/removed to better reflect your truth?
 3. Is there any missing or partial information that should be addressed before concluding the study?
6. If The Storyteller does not request to complete the member check with Crystasany Turner, they will be asked to respond with any concerns or amendments within ten days of receipt. No response from a participant will be considered permission to proceed with the analysis process with the data as is.
7. If a participant responds to the member checking with a concern or amendment, Crystasany will reanalyze the data with the new perspective. The new perceptive will become a part of the analysis and reflexivity process and will be written about as such.
8. If a participant responds to the member checking affirming that their views, feelings, and experiences are accurately reflected, Crystasany will send confirmation of receipt and a thank you email.
9. Crystasany will upload the revised notes and files to her password-protected computer.

APPENDIX L

Research Audit Trail

- **Identification of the Research Problem:** Before beginning my investigation, I called one hundred FCPs within four local, predominately Black zip codes to assess how many programs had closed and which FCPs remained open during the COVID-19 pandemic. This step gave me insight on whether the sample target population would be large enough to conduct the study.
- **The Research Proposal:** Based on the data gathered in the first step, I developed a proposal and submitted it to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's IRB subcommittee for approval. This proposal included the research questions, a review of the literature, an outline of the study methodology, and protocols for the data collection and member checking.
- **Reviewing the Literature:** An in-depth review of literature was undertaken to explore the history of Black women in the early childhood context. Despite decades of education research in this area, the literature review highlighted that the body of ECE knowledge of Black women's contributions was fragmented. Further, the study of Black women family childcare providers was highly underrepresented.
- **Designing a Research Framework:** The next step involved designing a research framework to support the collection of the qualitative data from The Storytellers' narratives. The review of literature revealed that narratives and storytelling have been historically preferred by Scholars of Color. Still, there lacked an approach for Black feminists made specifically for guiding the work of Black women scholars conducting narrative research and representing the voices of Black women. In response, I combined the narrative process of storytelling (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), the ritual and sacred aspects of endarkened feminist epistemologies (Dillard, 2016) and the culturally relevant philosophy of the community cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005) to create my methodological approach of endarkened feminist narrative.

Further, the use of the multiple nested case study methodology was based in the knowledge that the individual Storytellers, as units of study, are nested in the "place" of the family childcare programs within the city of focus. This setting offers unique characteristics of racial stratification, and is nested in the larger context of historical, political, and economic discriminatory policies and legislation, which tend to more heavily affect Educators of Color. All of these contexts were studied within the boundary of the COVID-19 pandemic. The integrity of the examination was sustained despite the adjustments made to adhere to the social distancing guidelines at the time. All data collection was implemented remotely.

- **Selection of Case Study Storytellers:** In order to achieve a homogenous sample, six state-licensed Black women family childcare providers were selected as participants. All

the FCPs primarily served Black children between the ages of birth and four years of age in the local urban community. The sample size was determined from previous research designed to discern experiences and perspectives of homogenous groups. The Storytellers were recruited from the top four predominately Black populated zip codes in the study context. I also used opportunistic sampling to follow leads on other Black women FCPs who fit the criteria of the study.

- **Gathering Narratives:** In total, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted across nine Storytellers. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were recorded and transcribed. Additionally, one two-hour community talk was held between the rounds of interviews with three of The Storytellers. The interview and community talk transcriptions were analyzed in the process of developing the study findings.

The interview protocol was designed to provide a focused history of The Storytellers' lives; their perceptions of their work with children and within the greater community; how they responded when faced with the "Safer at Home" order; what was taken into consideration when deciding to stay open; and what their experience was while sustaining themselves and their programs throughout the pandemic. Finally, I asked The Storytellers about how they networked within their communities. An interview protocol was designed to maintain consistency across all interview sessions (See Appendix H).

- **Managing and Analyzing the Narrative Data:** An inductive and deductive approach was used to analyze the qualitative data. To answer the question regarding the FCPs' cultural knowledge, I started with an inductive analysis to find the patterns and themes within the narratives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The themes and topics were colored-coded with pencils and highlighters to note their appearance within and between the accounts. Through constant data comparison, several key concepts emerged from the interview transcripts and these were coded into key themes. Through reflection on these concepts and iterative interaction with the narratives, these were later developed into categories, related sub-categories, and eventually the study findings.

To answer the question of what types of capital The Storytellers used, I used a deductive analysis. I aligned this analysis with the forms of capital described by Yosso (2005) and identified ways The Storytellers resisted, navigated, and aspired throughout their experiences.

- **Data Analysis Integrity Questions:** To check my assumptions, add to the trustworthiness of my findings, and avoid the misinterpretation or misrepresentation of The Storytellers' narratives, I adapted the data analysis integrity questions (p.104) adapted from Milner (2007) to keep at the forefront throughout the interpretation, coding, and analysis of the transcript data.
- **Data Triangulation:** The data was triangulated through various data collection methods (a community talk and two interviews) to gather a robust body of data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Alternating between the interviews and the community talk helped

establish rapport and provide details on The Storytellers' lived experiences and their perspective of the pandemic. Ultimately, the methodology provided space for The Storytellers to reflect on the ways they adapted to overcome the multifaceted effects of the health, economic, and social conditions before and during the pandemic.

- **Member Checks:** After editing the transcripts, I emailed them to each Storyteller and invited her to meet with me to review the data and ensure they accurately reflected her words, perspectives, and attitudes. I also invited The Storytellers to schedule a one-on-one, follow-up interview so I could ask clarifying questions that emerged during the analysis process. This member checking process contributed to the triangulation and rigor of the study's findings.
- **Adopting a Narrative Approach:** The higher order categories and sub-categories of the coding were the basis for developing the cross-case themes. The themes were substantiated by quotes from the Storytellers' narratives. Through extended reflection on the narratives and considering these three questions: (a) how do The Storytellers describe their backgrounds and everyday experiences; (b) how do these experiences inform their behaviors, perception, and cultural knowledge; and (c) how did The Storytellers demonstrate their various capitals throughout their experiences, the narratives were analyzed to develop the key research findings. Seven key findings centered on The Storytellers' cultural knowledge and forms of capital were presented as the study findings.
- **Summation of a New Research Approach:** Through a reflection on each finding, relationships between the findings and my frameworks of Black feminist thought and endarkened feminist narrative were further explored. The discussion was used to verify my original methodological framework of endarkened feminist narrative to extend beyond seminal frameworks.

CRYSTASANY R. TURNER

EDUCATION

Ph.D. University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee
Dec 2020 Urban Education, Curriculum and Instruction
Concentration: Early Childhood Education and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
Dissertation: *Black Women Family Childcare Providers' Roles as Community Mothers During the COVID-19 Pandemic*
Chair: Leanne M. Evans; Committee: Nancy File, Raquel Farmer-Hinton, Toshiba Adams

M.S. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
May 2014 Cultural Foundations of Education
Concentration: Multicultural Education and Arts Education

B.A. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
May 2011 Bachelor of Arts, Drawing and Painting with Honors
Minors: Spanish Language and Art History

Credentials

Wisconsin Registry Program Development Credential, UW- Platteville, *June 2017*
Wisconsin Registry Administrator Credential, UW- Platteville, *June 2015*

Areas of Specialization

Research Early childhood education, teacher education, culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy (CRP and CSP), multicultural education for social justice, Black feminist epistemologies, trauma-informed practices

Teaching Childcare administration and supervision, best practices for children and families in early childhood programs, operations management in early childhood programs, family and community relations, infant and toddler care and education

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- Aug 2015-Present **Bilingual (Spanish) Adjunct Instructor of Early Childhood Education**
University of Wisconsin-Platteville, Continuing Education Program
- Teach undergraduate classes in childcare administration and best practices
 - Collaborate with other instructors, administrators, and students to develop and modify culturally responsive curriculum in accordance to department standards
 - Assess students' understanding and competencies by reviewing papers and other assigned classwork
- May 2015-Aug 2015 **Bilingual Commissioner**
The Wisconsin Registry
- Objectively reviewed and assessed adult student project portfolios based on state and university requirements to grant commission
 - Upheld commission standards of excellence and professional competency in the field of early care and education
 - Mentored students regarding their portfolios and professional development goals
- 2013-Present **Early Childhood Teacher and Program Coordinator**
Roberson's Kiddie Lane Preschool and Childcare (Milwaukee, WI)
- Design and model culturally responsive curriculum and lesson plans for diverse urban youth (ages 2-12 years)
 - Recruit, hire, onboard, and mentor new teachers and assistants
 - Observe, assess, and document teachers' professional development
 - Create and facilitate monthly strategic planning sessions and professional development
- 2018-Present **Graduate Research Assistant**
University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee
Asset-based Cultural Competence Ensuring Student Success (ACCESS) Grant
A U.S. Department of Education Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) Grant
Principle Investigators: Donna L. Pasternak and Leanne M. Evans
- Review current literature around culturally based pedagogies
 - Gather, de-identify, code, and analyze qualitative data including interviews, community talks, fieldnotes, and questionnaires
 - Write and edit manuscripts for publication in academic research journals, present research findings at national and international conferences

- Facilitate professional development to align university programs and personnel in a common understanding of culturally based pedagogies

2009-2016 **Bilingual Preschool Teacher**
 Roberson’s Kiddie Lane Preschool and Childcare (Milwaukee, WI)

2010-2011 **Elementary and Middle School Spanish Teacher**
 St. Margaret Mary’s Catholic School (Milwaukee, WI)

2009-2010 **Elementary and Middle School Spanish Teacher**
 Northwest Catholic (Milwaukee, WI)

COURSES TAUGHT

Childcare Administrator’s Credential *Taught in Spanish Online/BlendEd*

TEACH 4530: Childcare Administration and Supervision
 TEACH 4530: Best Practices for Children and Families in Early Childhood Program
 TEACH 4530: Early Childhood Programs and the External Environment
 TEACH 4530: Operations Management in Early Childhood Programs
 TEACH 4530: Administrative Seminar

Infant and Toddler Credential Program

TEACH 4530: Family and Community Relations
 TEACH 4530: Infant and Toddler Development
 TEACH 4530: Group Care for Infants and Toddlers
 TEACH 4530: Infant/Toddler Capstone Seminar

Afterschool and Youth Development Credential Program *Taught Online/BlendEd*

TEACH 4530: Intentionality in Programming
 TEACH 4530: Engaging Youth in Groups
 TEACH 4530: Foundations of Afterschool and Youth Development
 TEACH 4530: Site Programming and Operations-Capstone Course

PUBLICATIONS

Articles

- Turner, C.R.** (In Press). Setting vision and practice standards in a multicultural childcare through transformational leadership: One program’s journey to national accreditation. *Exchange Press.*
- Evans, L.M., **Turner, C.R.**, Allen K.A. (2020). “Good teachers” with “good intentions”: Misappropriations of culturally responsive pedagogy. *Journal of Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research.*

Pasternak, D.L., Evans, L.A., **Turner, C.R.**, Allen K.A., Knapp, J., Malloy, A., Wu, X., Taylor, K., Bartlett, M., Habeck, T., Worm, J., and Nix, T. (2020). **The language of culturally-based practices in teacher education: A review of the literature.** *Journal of Urban Education*, 1-31.

Book Chapters

Turner, C.R. (In Review). Black family childcare providers' roles as community mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic. In J. Pattnaik & M. R. Jalongo (Eds.), *Impact of Covid-19 on the field of ECCE*. Springer

PRESENTATIONS

National and International Conferences

Pasternak, D.L., Lize, K.M., **Turner, C.R.**, Evans, L.M., Allen K.A., Knapp, J., Malloy, A. (2020, Nov). *Reconceptualizing Teacher Education Curriculum: A Culturally Responsive Framework* [Social Justice Roundtable]. National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Virtual Convention.

Evans, L.M., **Turner, C.R.**, Allen K.A., Knapp, J., Malloy, A., Pasternak, D.L. (2020, May). *The language of culturally-based pedagogy in teacher education research* [Paper presentation]. International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI) Conference, Urbana, IL, United States. (Accepted for presentation but conference cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic)

Evans, L.M., **Turner, C.R.**, Allen K.A., Knapp, J., Malloy, A., Pasternak, D.L. (2020, May). *Beyond unitary constructs of school culture: A comparative case study* [Paper presentation]. International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI) Conference, Urbana, IL, United States. (Accepted for presentation but conference cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic)

Turner, C.R., Allen K.A., Evans, L.M. (2019, October). "*We have been hoodwinked and bamboozled*": *Re-envisioning culturally responsive professional development in an examination of willingness* [Paper presentation]. Teacher Education Council of State Colleges and Universities (TECSCU), New Orleans, LA, United States.

Worm, J., **Turner, C.R.** (2019, August). *The willingness study: A model for evaluation, research and process improvement* [Conference presentation]. U.S. Department of Education EED SUMMIT, Washington D.C., United States.

Turner, C.R., Allen K.A., Knapp, J., Malloy, A., Evans, L.M., Pasternak, D.L. (2019, April) *Teacher willingness to participate in PD focused on cultural responsiveness: A school district/university collaboration* [Paper presentation]. American Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Toronto, Canada.

Turner, C.R., Allen K.A., Evans, L.M., Pasternak, D.L. (2019, February) *Culturally and linguistically responsive research and practice* [Paper presentation]. American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), Louisville, KY, United States.

Turner, C.R., Allen K.A., Wolk, M.A., Evans, L.M., Pasternak, D.L. (2018, October) *A critical examination of terminology used to identify and represent culturally and linguistically responsive research and practice* [Paper presentation]. First International Conference on Literacy, Culture, and Language Education, Bloomington, IN, United States.

Turner, C.R. (2017, November). *Arts integration in early education* [Poster presentation]. National Association for the Education of the Young Child Annual Conference, Atlanta, GA, United States.

Local and Regional Conferences

- Turner, M.** and **Turner C.R.** (2020, May). *Terminating gracefully and legally* [Conference session]. Wisconsin Child Care Administration Association (WCCAA) Conference, Appleton, WI, United States. (Accepted for presentation but conference cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic)
- Turner, M.** and **Turner C.R.** (2020, March). *Terminating gracefully and legally* [Conference session]. University of Wisconsin-Platteville Early Childhood Education Conference, Platteville, WI, United States. (Accepted for presentation but conference cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic)
- Turner, C.R.** (2019, July). *Guiding early educators in trauma informed practice* [Conference session]. Wisconsin Child Care Administrators Association, Waukesha, WI, United States.
- Turner, C.R.** (2019, April). *Trauma informed care and the benefits of mindfulness* [Conference session]. UW-Whitewater Early Childhood Conference, Whitewater, WI, United States.
- Turner, C.R.** (2019, March). *Trauma informed care and cultural sensitivity* [Conference session]. 32nd Annual Early Childhood Conference, Platteville, WI, United States.
- Turner, C.R.** (2019, October). *Trauma informed care and the reflective practitioner* [Conference session]. Wisconsin Early Childhood Association Conference, Madison, WI, United States.
- Turner, C.R.** (2018, April). *Culturally responsive teaching within education* [Conference session]. University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Early Childhood Education Conference, Whitewater, WI, United States.
- Turner, C.R.** (2018, March). *Culturally responsive teaching for the 21st century* [Conference session]. University of Wisconsin-Platteville Early Childhood Education Conference, Platteville, WI, United States.
- Turner, C.R.** (2018, March). *Stronger together: Cultivating appreciation for diversity in children, families and communities* [Conference session]. Fulfilling the Promise, Milwaukee, WI, United States.
- Turner, C.R.** and **Wolk, M.A.** (2018, February). *A.C.C.E.S.S.ing cultural competence: An exploration of cultural frameworks and the connection to classroom practice* [Conference session]. Towards Culturally Relevant Community Schools Conference, Milwaukee, WI, United States.
- Turner, C.R.** (2017, November). *Arts integration in the early education: Building bridges through the creative process* [Conference session]. Wisconsin Early Childhood Association, Wisconsin Dells, WI, United States.
- Turner, C.R.** (2017, August). *Arts integration in the early education: Building bridges through the creative process* [Conference session]. Pathways to Quality, Milwaukee, WI, United States.
- Turner, M.** and **Turner, C.R.** (2017, March). *Culturally responsive teaching for the 21st century* [Conference session]. University of Wisconsin-Platteville Early Childhood Education Conference, Platteville, WI, United States.
- Turner, M.** and **Turner, C.R.** (2017, March). *Culturally responsive teaching for the 21st century* [Conference session]. National Afterschool Association, Wisconsin Dells, WI, United States.

SERVICE TO THE PROFESSION

- Committee Member of Early Childhood Curriculum Development, UW-Platteville (2016-present)
- Board member of the Urban Education Doctoral Student Association, UW-Milwaukee (2020-present)

SIGNIFICANT CONTINUING EDUCATION

- UW-Milwaukee School of Education and ACCESS Grant: Beyond Diversity Professional Development (2019)
- Wisconsin Training and Technical Assistance Professional (T-TAP) Master Trainer (2017)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

2013-2015 Volunteer Interpreter for CORE/El Centro, Milwaukee, WI
2013-2015 Volunteer for Empowering Latino Parents, Milwaukee, WI
2009-2010 Bilingual Volunteer at United Community Center, Milwaukee, WI
2007-2008 President of UW-Waukesha African American Union

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

American Educational Research Association
National Association for the Education of Young Children
Wisconsin Early Childhood Association
Sigma Delta Pi National Hispanic Honors Society since 2010
Pi Lambda Theta since 2018