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(RE)DEFINING OUR STORIES: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF BLACK WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES OF MENTAL HEALTH AND SPIRITUAL HEALING

by

Chanda Michelle Lee Dunn

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Higher and Adult Education

The University of Memphis

March 2022
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to all Black women and girls who wish to have their stories and voices heard. There is power in your stories and power that runs through your veins. This is my act of love to you.
Acknowledgments

I want to thank God for His everlasting love and power. If it had not been for Him, then I would not be here today. Thank you to the participants of this study for being powerful and vulnerable in this process. A huge thank you to my advisor and Dissertation chair, Dr. Edith Gnanadass for saving me from giving up on myself. You had my back from day one. To my committee members, I am so appreciative of your support. Additionally, I want to thank my siblings Sha, Cat, Jackie, and Shawn for protecting me throughout these years. You have watched me in pain and through progress. I cannot thank you enough. When I could not do for myself, you all made sure I could survive. To my mom, you are the strongest woman I know. Dad, thank you for your unconditional love. Lastly, thank you to my ace Chandler, and my heartbeats, Caleb, and Kieran…you three are my peace of mind.
Abstract

The unique healing and coping perspectives of Black women that have been silenced and traditionally left out of education and mental health offer diverse, unique, and critical understanding of healing and mental health that has not been considered in the past. The purpose of this study was to describe the lived experiences of Black women’s mental health and methods of spiritual healing from intersecting oppressions. The research questions that guided this study were centered on identifying how Black women understand and narrate their experiences of mental health, the role of misrepresentations on Black women’s mental health, and the methods of spiritual healing and coping. In this Black/endarkened feminist narrative study, four Black women were interviewed using unstructured interviews to understand how the participants narrated, processed, and coped with experiences of intersecting oppressions. Daughtering was used as the methodological tool to engage in the process of analyzing and interpreting the data. The findings revealed that Black women experienced a lack of self-care and increased stress due to a perceived obligation to take on multiple role responsibilities. The participants were empowered to take control of harmful deficit-fueled narratives of Black women to (re)define their identities and mental health experiences. Lastly, the study showed the use of spirituality and the (re)narration of experiences as a diverse method of healing and coping that was individualized to each participant.

Keywords: Black women’s mental health, healing, spirituality, daughtering, Black feminist theory, endarkened feminism, narrative inquiry, controlling images
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I cannot find myself. I cannot hear myself. I am unable to locate myself in spaces of education that continuously suggest there is a commitment to the inclusion of Black women only to remove our voice and intellect. I am not present in this space. My experiences deserve space and acknowledgment. My emotions and experiences within society have been excluded causing me to search for meaning and visibility. Methods of healing and coping for Black women are pivotal aspects of ensuring that education is inclusive of all experiences and ways of learning. Non-critical methodologies and epistemology informed by dominant perspectives and oppressive descriptions have contributed to the invisibility of group standpoints of those who operate within the margins. To focus specifically on dismantling the structures that offer very little representation of Black women is an opportunity for Black women to be seen and heard. This increased visibility and honoring of Black women’s experiences allows for Black women to receive the acknowledgment of their experiences and knowledge that is deserved.

Personal Context

My history of anxiety and depression is an aspect of myself that has been pivotal to understanding my life. My mother described me as “a nervous child” who struggled with letting issues go and making sense of what was happening in my daily life. I was always “doing too much” and constantly adding tasks onto my plate. I worried and experienced the physiological signs of anxiety, such as stomach aches, headaches, and low energy. There was a constant worry about my health, family, job, and hair. All I had ever known was a continuous pit in my stomach and racing heart while doing what I
perceived to be the simplest activities. My anxiety evolved into sadness and depression as I navigated my teenage and adult life. The extent of my struggles was not yet known or understood by me.

I struggled with identifying the basis of these emotions, and I am now generally more knowledgeable about how these struggles impacted my life. My emotions were never categorized as a manifestation of a more significant issue, and I always felt like those issues were brushed off by my family as me simply trying to get out of a task or school. I was suffering in silence, and I was only a teenager. Despite my anxiety, sadness, and feelings of impending doom, I graduated high school in the top 10% of my graduating class and successfully gained admission to the University of Georgia. Upon my admission, I was told by a White male high school teacher, “You only got in because they had a quota to reach.” My excitement was extinguished, and I questioned if I truly belonged or if I could even handle the pressure.

I reached college and was faced with immense difficulty. Not only was I navigating the new experience of leaving a small, rural town and transitioning to a large public university, but I was met with struggles of belonging, health issues, and pressure to be successful. I found myself trying to get by, barely making it, and failing classes. I sought help at the university counseling center with the belief that I would get a chance to feel better. When I arrived at my appointment, to my dismay, I was met by an older, White man with gray hair. Upon seeing him, I turned and walked out the door, never to go back, which eventually led to me almost getting kicked out of college. This was my introduction to the realization that college came with emotional and social difficulty and that those who were there to “help” me were not representations of myself. I was
wrapped in the pressure not to fail my family or myself, but I was encouraged to “keep
going, keep pushing,” ultimately hiding my true emotions from others.

I majored in social work wanting to create a change and increase the
representation of Black women. I wanted to share my experiences of anxiety and
depression through clinical intervention and therapeutic guidance. This has been my role
and my passion ever since 2010. I was lucky enough to say that I made it out of college
with two degrees in the end. In retrospect, I made it out but was still tasked with
navigating the multiple roles of my life with the various instances of injustice and pain
that I experienced as a Black woman. I achieved success, but my anxiety and depression
had not gone away. The experiences during college were an indication that my mental
health struggles would not disappear but instead be triggered by the various situations
that moved beyond academics and college life and into the “real world.” My focus was
no longer on surviving coursework but instead on surviving injustice and the attacks on
Blackness.

The year 2020 has been defined by a social justice movement that triggered a
massive response from many across the United States. It was a year marked by a social
justice movement that resonated with millions who supported the lives and experiences of
Black people. I could scream, “Black lives matter!” and support a movement of change
and justice. Advocacy for people who looked like me and shared experiences with me
was purposeful. Yet, advocacy was exhausting and emotionally stressful. I found myself
at odds with the response of academia and the limited focus on how social justice
movements can exacerbate mental health concerns among students. These experiences
led me to question how other Black women experienced struggles with mental health and
how they coped with these struggles. My past experiences and struggles with mental health became prevalent for me. They became intertwined with the racialized experiences of death, the misrepresentations of the Black community’s pain, college life, and the poor attempts by society to reconcile these injustices. I just found myself crying at times, knowing that I was overwhelmed. I sought to find other Black women who shared similar experiences and how they navigated their survival.

I questioned how I managed to get through these experiences and whether my experiences have been shared across the collective of Black women. My intention in this study was to seek out the stories of women who may have different backgrounds and experiences but share the same racial identity as me as a Black or African American woman. My positionality places me perfectly within the realm of gathering the experiences of Black women’s survival as I am a member of the group, which sits among those who have experienced race, gender, and class oppression. I devote my research to the women who are amid the survival of their lives and those who have overcome the mighty forces of attempted defeat.

**Theoretical Context**

**Black Feminist Theory**

Black feminist theory and Endarkened feminism were my theoretical frameworks for this study. Specifically, I applied Collins’ (1989, 2000) perspective of Black feminism to inform my study as I sought to gather the experiences of Black women for the development of culturally responsive educational tools, mental health services, and teaching methods. Black feminist theory is ideal for reclaiming and reinterpreting experiences of spirituality and mental health that Black women experience because of
their intersecting oppressions (Martins et al., 2020). Black feminist theory provides the foundational guidance to “reconceptualize all dimensions of the dialectic of oppression and activism as it applies to African-American women” (Collins, 2000, p. 13). It is a frame of understanding and inquiry that analyzes Black women’s perspectives from a multidimensional and multidisciplinary lens. Black feminism is partial and favorable to Black women’s experiences, and the theory cannot be applied universally. It is designed specifically for the unique needs of Black women and how they may be able to address them within multiple disciplines.

Black women’s theories and standpoints have been historically overlooked in social and political aspects, limiting the acknowledgment of their lived experiences as a legitimate site of knowledge (Collins, 2000). Research for and about Black women is seldomly viewed as rigorous and respectable within predominantly White institutions (Acuff, 2018; Patterson et al., 2016). The strategic and purposeful use of Black feminist theory was an attempt to explore and center the standpoint of Black women’s experiences of coping and spirituality through their complex journeys of surviving oppressive systems.

Endarkened Feminism

In addition to using Black feminist theory, I used Dillard’s (2000) endarkened feminist theory to deepen the connection to the role of spirituality and healing in research and the process of making meaning of lived experiences. Dillard defined endarkened feminist epistemology as the articulation of

How reality is known when based in historical roots of Black feminist thought, embodying a distinguishable difference in cultural standpoint, located in the
intersection/overlap of the culturally constructed socializations of race, gender, and other identities and the historical and contemporary contexts of oppressions and resistance for African American women. (p. 662)

The disruption of thought provides a lens for group standpoint that attunes to cultural experiences of oppression and survival within research. Endarkened feminism offers the notion that research must “incorporate the act of remembrance as a space for cultural healing along with spiritual traditions that can seek to produce new and multiple avenues” (Bostic & Manning, 2015, p. 132) for teaching and research. As an epistemological approach, Dillard (2000) asserted that endarkened feminist epistemology:

At its epistemic core, …[is] a move away from the fundamentally wrongheaded assumptions that undergird such a metaphor in my work and the work of others, and toward a recognition of my own African-centered cultural identity and community. This *necessitates* [emphasis in original] a different relationship between me, as the researcher, and the researched, between my knowing and the production of knowledge. (p. 4)

This method is an alternative approach to epistemology as researchers are now responsible for “asking for new ways of looking into the reality of others that opens our own lives to view and makes us accountable to the people whom we study” (Dillard, 2000, p. 662). Dillard (2006) suggested that endarkened feminism serves as an alternative approach to epistemology for researchers who “have the courage and desire to understand and embrace the metaphor of research as the responsibility” (p. 120) and obligation “to the very persons and communities being engaged in the inquiry” (p. 5). Endarkened
feminism allows for the inclusion of how Black women process their experiences of oppression and discrimination while considering how spirituality is modeled throughout the meaning-making of experiences. Endarkened feminism is a critical theory that challenges White, racist, and patriarchal hegemony and encourages individuals to (re)member their past experiences to reconnect to their spiritual and social identities (Dillard, 2000, 2016). Dillard’s (2000) process of (re)membering helped me understand how Black women make sense of their lives and heal through meaning-making. Black feminist theory and endarkened feminism provide a new perspective on the role of spirituality in processing through experiences related to the intersecting oppressions and disrupt past research and education that has been insufficiently and inaccurately represented as nonexistent.

**Statement of the Problem**

Black women’s lived experiences are unique and contribute to a wealth of knowledge pivotal to intellectual production, social institutions, and society. While these experiences are instrumental to the knowledge production process of society, very seldom are Black women’s experiences of mental health represented accurately (Jones & Guy-Sheftall, 2015). Even though racialized and gendered experiences have been studied in educational research, Dillard (2018) argued that the need for research focused on Black women’s racialized and gendered experiences remains a necessity, especially since the Black feminist standpoint and struggle are rendered invisible. The experiences at the intersection of both race and gender remain at the forefront for Black women, and these experiences offer a unique perspective on survival and “[uncover] the ideologies that have been taken for granted, that those have traditionally left unproblematic our goals,
purpose, and practice in educational research” (Dillard, 2000, p. 662). Focusing on these unique experiences from a Black feminist and endarkened perspective provides insight into the self-defined and healing standpoints of Black women.

The mental health of Black women is an essential factor when addressing educational, familial, and life successes. During the 2020 social justice protests and advocacy movements, there was witnessing the emotional impact of systemic oppression on Black women across the nation. The lost lives of Breonna Taylor, Atatiana Jefferson, and countless other Black sisters added to the emotional burden and complexity of Black women’s mental health and well-being. Black women have been forced to negotiate their participation in the struggle for visibility and against violence on their minds and bodies as women in the Civil Rights Movement. While the Civil Rights Movement focused on the liberation of all Black people, it did not focus on Black women’s unique experiences of interlocking oppressions and gendered racism. It focused on Blackness as a homogenous system dominated by Black masculinity. Paired with the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) global pandemic, the likelihood of stress due to adversity increased. Yet, Black women returned to coursework, employment, and daily life activities while still navigating these challenges. As I witnessed people joining together for humanity and advocacy, I reflected on my attempts at coping. I realized a set of stories were missing and unaccounted for within the academy. Abrams et al. (2019) reported that “Black women have described being overwhelmed by pressures to embody strength and be resilient for their families and communities” (p. 518). The perseverance of Black women as they seek to understand emotional and life-changing experiences while also attending to their many daily roles and tasks must be appreciated and understood. The emotional
and spiritual experience of survival and journeys as one navigates through oppressive structures is unattended and left out of consideration. As the field of adult education embraces transformative learning (i.e., how learners make sense of their experiences, Christie et al., 2015) toward liberatory practice, I sought to include the knowledge set and standpoints of the most unprotected beings, Black women, within education. My interest was focused on exploring how Black women experience mental health due to multiple oppressions and their methods of coping with these emotions and experiences.

The mental health of Black women is impacted by intersectional oppression (Martins et al., 2020). Racism, sexism, and class oppression (Collins, 1989, 2000) in the United States, result in the multiple jeopardy of race, gender, and class exclusion and erasure of Black women who attempt to navigate and enter educational institutions. Stressors related to discrimination and racialized experiences can affect mental health (Varela Martins et al., 2020). Martins et al. (2020) contended that “asymmetrical power relations between discriminant and discriminated groups related to different socioeconomic status...and the perception of discrimination experiences at an individual level, may culminate in high levels of psychological stress and physical and mental health problems” (p. 2794). Daily functioning and tasks, understanding adverse experiences, and relationship management can be impacted by stress and painful experiences, indicating that while these experiences can lead to stress or a mental health diagnosis, that is not always the case for Black women.

In some instances, the disruption of daily functioning can create difficulty that requires individuals to enter a journey towards understanding and growth, whether through a spiritual process, group or individual experiences, or traditional counseling.
Because of the high stigmatization of the need for mental health services, Black women seek strategies and interventions that are not grounded in the necessity to diagnose, medicate, or pathologize but rather those that offer guidance, support, clarity, and group understanding (Jones & Guy-Sheftall, 2015).

While spirituality has been a large part of the healing methods within Black and African culture, researchers have focused on using religion for healing and not the concept of spirituality (Heath, 2006). The limited use of spirituality in mental health and educational research has been accounted for by assuming that spirituality is not measurable. There is limited documentation of its use as a healing method within therapeutic interventions (Heath, 2006). There is a current need to research and describe the use of spirituality in Black women’s healing experiences as a protective factor against adversity and poor health and academic outcomes. Black women’s experiences of coping and healing with oppression are deeply rooted in spirituality, yet there is an overrepresentation of white, patriarchal beliefs on healing in research of mental health, Black women, and religion and spirituality (Dillard, 2006; Heath, 2006; Shorter-Gooden, 2004).

The role of spirituality within this study was influential in understanding the survival and coping mechanisms of Black women. Spirituality refers to the “belief in God, the Creator, or a Higher Power and the power of spiritual beliefs in one’s life” (Boyd-Franklin, 2010, p. 979). Spirituality involves a consciousness of all things in life that are connected to the individual. It is the reflection and practice of finding meaning in personal experiences. Black women’s experiences and mental health must be placed within the context of understanding how one can heal from intersecting oppressions.
through the process of understanding and meaning-making that occurs with spirituality.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe Black women’s experiences of mental health and their methods of spiritual healing from intersecting oppressions. Black women have endured centuries of oppression at the intersection of racism, sexism, and other “isms;” Black women are challenged with finding ways to manage the impact on their lives (Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Conquering the pain related to intersecting oppressions requires Black women to resist the damaging and deficit-based ideologies and engage in healing to decrease poor psychological and physical consequences. To engage in the process of healing is to “look for ways to nurture well in self and others” (Evans et al., 2017, p. 6). The process is unique to each Black woman and does not imply that one healing method holds hierarchy over another. It is a process of transformation that aids in the growth and survival of Black women.

Mental health and educational research have historically left out Black women’s unique perspectives of healing and survival. While research exists on the general coping methods of Black women, a limited amount of research has been conducted on how Black women spiritually cope with intersecting oppression’s impact on their mental health and well-being (Abrams et al., 2019; Heath, 2006; Shorter-Gooden, 2004).

Meek et al. (2017) indicated that a focus on mental health “is an essential component of individuals’ overall health and well-being” (p. 103) and a significant predictor of adult learners’ academic success and functioning. Mental health issues are prevalent among adult students due to the additional barriers that they face because of
learning and life stressors such as (a) family obligations, (b) lack of confidence in academic ability, (c) a lack of sense of belonging, time, and (d) health concerns (Meek et al., 2017). Adult education lacks resources dedicated to understanding students’ mental health and healing needs that would aid in supporting adult learners within the classroom and communities. The hindrance is that current education is dominated by White, heteropatriarchal perspectives toward racialized experiences and healing methods for faculty, staff, and students (Evans et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2019). Johnson-Bailey (2010) noted that overall research about Black women had been based on heterogeneous sampling to analyze the complexity of these experiences. Dominant ideology and mental health perspectives are flooding communities and higher education institutions creating a one-sided perspective of how to support learners through stressful experiences and adversity. This study provides the unique healing and coping perspectives of Black women traditionally left out of education and mental health to offer diverse, unique, and critical understandings of healing and mental health that have not been considered. New and progressive methods to incorporate spirituality and healing based on Black women’s strength and survival into education is possible through this research study.

In this Black/endarkened feminist narrative study, I interviewed four Black women to understand how the participants narrated, processed, and coped with experiences of intersecting oppressions and the connection of those experiences to Black women’s mental health and spiritual journey. I intentionally disrupted the traditional paradigms and representations about Black women’s mental health developed by dominant ideologies and deficit-oriented frameworks. The contribution to research supports and adds to the models of resistance that empower Black women’s voices and
ideas and produces knowledge that directly contradicts the misrepresentations of Black women’s mental health and lived experiences. This study aimed to disrupt and dismantle traditional paradigms of Black women’s experiences of mental health and healing methods based on deficit approaches by using critical social theory grounded in Black feminist epistemology.

**Research Questions**

The research study consisted of two primary research questions and one secondary research question. The research questions were intended to gather the open and unaltered stories of Black women’s mental health and healing and contribute to adult education literature that focuses on highlighting the experiences of Black women through critical methodologies such as Black feminist theory and Endarkened feminism. The research questions of my study were:

1. How do Black women understand, process, and narrate their experiences and meanings of mental health?
   a. What role does the misrepresentations of Black women’s mental health have on the mental health of the participants of the study?
2. What are Black women’s methods of spiritual healing in terms of mental health?

**Significance of the Study**

My research study is, first and foremost, dedicated to Black women who struggle to find representation and authentic understanding of their lives and identity within higher and adult education. It is for the Black women who have been silenced and erased from culture by the perpetuation of oppression by both the oppressors and those who have
falsely identified themselves as advocates of Black women. Providing insight into Black women’s shared experiences of healing and survival is instrumental to their navigation of intersecting oppressions and allows them to see that they are not on a journey of healing and survival on their own. I contend that my research study is primarily for all Black women and Black girls.

In this research study, I present the teaching methods and resource development of colleges and universities that struggle to address the coinciding mental health and racialized and gendered experiences facing Black women. Adult education has attempted to highlight the use of critical and nontraditional theories within the knowledge production process, but there remains a historical silence and erasure of Black women’s experiences and intellectual contributions to the field (Johnson-Bailey, 2010; West, 2019). Johnson-Bailey (2010) explained using narrative inquiry to describe Black women’s experiences highlighting their “multiple voices, whether ordered as discourse or free-flowing as dialogue, produce a symphony of ideas and often lay the groundwork for better understanding” (p. 85) within adult education. The study will hopefully deepen the understanding and support the need for educators to include the unique standpoint of survival and healing that serves as a viable aspect of research. It will expand the growing literature that represents Black women and is authentic to the experiences and needs of the group. By combining Black feminist theory and spirituality of meaning-making, I am directly challenging all that has been known previously to be true within the educational and social institutions.

Assumptions
It was assumed that this study would not be representative of all Black women who have experienced mental struggles and spirituality. It was assumed that participants would be eager to discuss their experiences of mental health and oppression. It was further assumed that the participants would provide accurate and factual responses to their experiences.

Limitations

The limitations of this study included the small sample size, restricting participation to the Memphis/Shelby County area. The study was also limited to Black women who met the criteria of enjoying storytelling, were aware of their mental health struggles, and only women who identified as spiritual individuals. The study was limited because only four participants were interviewed for the study. They represented a small portion of Black women who have lived experiences of mental health and spirituality. While the interviews were rich with data, I would have chosen to recruit additional participants to add depth and diversity to the experiences shared. Additionally, restricting participation to participants living in the Memphis/Shelby County area limited the geographical scope and significance of the location. I would have like to widen the recruitment area to women in a larger geographical area; however, there is historical significance to the Memphis/Shelby County area. The significance and rich social justice history served as a strength for this study, yet a larger area would create an additional aspect of diversity related to the geographic locations of the participant’s narratives.

Delimitations

This study was comprised of participants that met the selection criteria, which were Black women over the age of 18 who lived in the Memphis and Shelby County,
Tennessee area. The study did not engage with participants that did not enjoy storytelling, did not identify as spiritual individuals, and individuals that did not express an awareness of mental health struggles. To ensure emotional safety and minimize potential risks, the study also did not engage with individuals with self-reported severe and persistent mental illness that was not safely managed. The study was conducted from August 2021 to December 2021 in the West Tennessee area within the southeastern region of the United States. This research study focused on how Black women process and narrate their lived experiences of mental health, methods of spiritual healing and coping, and the misrepresentations of the mental health experiences.

**Definition of Terms**

Defining the key terms is an essential part of this study. Key terms are defined below:

- **Mental health**: The response to the emotional, social, physical, and psychological stressors that can encompass the mind and the body at any time in life. Martins et al. (2020) described mental health as: The result of multiple and complex relationships between biological, psychological, and social factors that depends on a dynamic balance between the individual’s interactions and the interaction of other people, taking into account organic characteristics and personal and family background. (p. 2794)

- **Spirituality**: Spirituality is defined as “the individual search for meaning, connected to one’s most animating and vital life issues and concerns” (Heath, 2006, p.158) that involves a
“deep concern and commitment to the collective well-being” (Heath, 2006, p. 158).

- **Spiritual Healing**: For the purposes of this study, spiritual healing refers to how Black women center spirituality to find meaning of their life experiences and existence as a method of survival against oppression (see Heath, 2006).

**Research Design**

**Research Approach**

Narrative inquiry was used to capture the voices and stories of the thoughts and group standpoints of Black women’s modes of survival of the many life experiences impacted by intersecting oppressions (Kim, 2016). Narrative inquiry emphasizes the stories and the creation of meaning using the unaltered voices of those that we engage in research with (Kim, 2016). It is without boundaries and limitations, allowing for the inclusion of spirituality as a valid and truthful addition of data. Narrative inquiry is more than just stories but also serves as testimonies and reaffirmations for reality involving the lives of Black women (Toliver, 2020). Black women storytellers can “draw from history, real-life experiences, personal feelings, and imagination to create intricate testimonies for their listeners to witness” (Toliver, 2020, p. 508). As Black feminist theory (Collins, 1989, 2000) and endarkened feminism (Dillard, 2006) are applied within narrative inquiry, the opportunity to uncover and reveal the subjugated knowledge and experiences of Black women becomes present.
Sampling

I conducted my research in Shelby County, Tennessee, and the participants took part in virtual interviews from differing locations within Shelby County, Tennessee. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and as a measure of safety, the research was conducted through Zoom, a Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliant virtual platform. My research participants were women self-identifying as Black, at least 18 years of age, and lived in Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee. Criterion sampling was initially used; however, snowball sampling was used for recruitment (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) to identify four study participants who met study criteria and to ensure that I gathered the most influential and in-depth data.

Data Collection

My unit of analysis was the group because of the collective group standpoints of survival, healing, and coping methods of Black women serving as data. Life stories were gathered through unstructured interviews (see Kim, 2016) with participants to gather the unfragmented and open stories of Black women. I was committed to ensuring that I connected with the participants through relationship-building while allowing participants to be in control of what stories were shared according to their truths. Relationship building and rapport were essential to developing trust with participants, and holding multiple interviews was an act of joining for increased trust. Memos and journaling narrated my process of data collection, data analysis, and the validity of the research process.
Data Analysis

I used *daughtering* (see Evans-Winters, 2019) through the process of analyzing the data. It is a framework that is dedicated to Black women and their unique lived experiences and, “…teaches us to love those whom have harmed us, and loathe those whom have harmed the ones we love” (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 137). Evans-Winters (2019) posited that daughtering is a true reflection and analysis of Black women’s experiences and informs their worldview by decoding others’ interpretations of their identities while giving access to a generally untouched knowledge set. The data were processed through a ritual of reading, reflecting, contemplating, and writing. Because there was no instruction manual on how the daughtering process occurs, I journaled each step that I took to analyze my participants' stories and the methods of interpretation. This step provided an increased understanding of the analytical process, but it was a mindful path I undertook to understand Black women’s narratives.

The data that I gathered from this narrative study were categorized into themes related to (a) data about Black women’s perceptions and experiences of mental health, (b) data about Black women’s methods of spiritual healing, and (c) data related to Black women’s group survival from intersecting oppressions. I sought stories and data that would help uncover Black women’s realities and truths of silence and oppression on their mental health. I engaged in research and writing as a form of survival for Black women, and I followed the path of Christian (1987) who penned, “what I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life. And I mean that literally…a way of knowing that I am not hallucinating” (p. 77). Black feminist research in mental health and healing assists
with Black women’s survival as they seek to find reality and representation of their lived experiences.

Outline

In Chapter 2, I discuss Black feminist theory and endarkened feminism’s concept of spirituality and the sacred. I focus on the core themes of Black feminist theory and endarkened feminism, drawing upon what each theory adds to this study and the limitations of the theory. I conducted this literature review to provide a framework to understand better how I am decolonizing narratives of Black women’s mental health experiences and spiritual journeys of healing. In Chapter 3, I discuss my methodology, outlining how I used Black feminist theory within narrative inquiry to disrupt dominant ideologies of Black women and reshape representations of their experiences. I describe my research questions, theoretical framework, and methods. I am specifically detailed how I used Black feminist theory and endarkened feminism to guide my methods of unstructured interviewing and daughtering. I discuss the research site, participant selection process and attend to positionality and ethics. In Chapter 4, I present my findings from the data. Chapter 5 provides my analysis/interpretation and representation of this study.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter expounds on Black feminist theory and endarkened feminism as the two major theoretical frameworks that inform my study. I will provide an overview and background, discuss core themes, and the connection between the theoretical perspectives, adult education, and my research. Black feminist theory was chosen due to the focus on the role of intersecting oppressions in Black women’s lived experiences. It provides a framework for interpreting how Black women understand and make meaning from these experiences. Black feminist thought is used in this study as the primary theory that guides the process of uncovering Black women’s many truths and meanings of intersecting oppressions and mental health and their role in their lives. The aim of my study on the lived experiences of mental health and healing of Black women was to dismantle the oppressive structures within both society and academia and challenge the taken for granted notions of Black women’s representation of mental health and the process of healing. Black feminism is centered on Black women’s experiences. The knowledge gained can be transferred across cultural, social, and emotional contexts while considering the historical and current implications for human experiences of Black women as an oppressed and marginalized group to improve adult education practice and personal knowledge while working towards liberation within the academy.

Overview of Black Feminist Theory

Black women have played a pivotal role in civil and human rights movements and within multiple aspects of society; however, often, their efforts have gone unnoticed or discredited in a culture of domination and power (Shorter-Goorden, 2004). The importance of pointing out Black women’s oppression rests in the historic failure to
acknowledge their lived experiences. Historically, the portrayal and experiences of Black women have been developed and communicated through narratives within dominant patriarchal ideology, thus adding to the importance of Black women taking charge of their stories. Due to the failure to acknowledge the power and knowledge of Black women and hear their silenced voices, Black women were emboldened to create a movement that empowered and benefited them directly (Collins, 2000). Built upon the work of Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells, Claudia Jones, Frances Beale, Barbara Smith, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Deborah King, and countless others, Black feminist thought theorizes, explores, and narrates the lived experiences of Black women. As Black feminist scholars, they have encouraged us to think more globally and critically about the “shared legacy of struggle and oppressions and remember that the experiences of women of African ascent have been shaped by varying forms of domination including slavery and colonialism” (Dillard, 2016b, p. 408). The experiences of exclusion of Black women’s knowledge production, teaching, and educational research reaches across the globe for a shared experience of women who self-identify as Black and with African ancestral origins.

Black feminist thought was developed to ignite a social justice movement that highlights the everyday and past experiences and knowledge of Black women within society. Its purpose continues to be rooted in analyzing the intersection of racism, classism, and sexism present in Black women’s lives (Alinia, 2015; Collins, 1995). Black feminist thought is purposeful towards bringing the stories and multiple realities of Black women into the forefront of academia and intellectual production. The representation of
Black women is an encouragement to make the invisible visible and contribute to new and transformative methods of knowledge in education.

**History of Black Feminist Theory**

Collins’ development of Black feminist thought as a theoretical framework emerged as an epistemological, theoretical, and academic response to excluding Black women’s experiences within multiple facets of society and academia. Developed with foundations of critical race theory and feminism, Black feminist thought emerged as an affirmation that Black womanhood was a unique and valid experience and not merely an interpretation of false understanding conducted by domination culture (Battle-Baptiste, 2017; Collins, 1990; Cooper, 2015). Black feminist thought as a theoretical framework is an extension of decades of political activism and resistance of Black women and served as the beginning of a powerful movement that would serve as a defining move to Black women’s liberation. The development and evolution of Black feminist philosophy and consciousness have origins in slavery and the everyday struggles of survival and liberation of Black women (Collins, 2000; Wallace, 2009). The liberation of sharing experiences and emotions related to Black women’s experiences is pivotal to the discourse surrounding the mental health and racialized experiences of Black women. These discussions add to positive relationships and increase the impact of storytelling and sharing for healing practices. Gaining the perspective of Black women’s shared emotional experiences and narratives allows for the invisible to be made visible in society and encourages the inclusion of their realities in all aspects of life. This study represents Black women’s stories of mental health and healing and provides findings that will contribute to the discourse surrounding Black women. Black feminist thought is and will
continue to be necessary as an activist response that opposes the oppressive worldview of issues that affect Black women (Collins, 2000).

To understand the theoretical view of Black feminist thought, Black feminism and traditional feminism as a movement must be analyzed. Black women-led advocacy movements of antislavery, antiwar, and labor movements led to their involvement in the Second Wave Feminist movement (Wallace, 2009). Their involvement exhibited the powerfulness, creativity to change, and necessity of Black women serving active roles within social justice movements.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, inspired by the Civil Rights movement, the Feminist movement took shape as women advocated for a more robust and enhanced role within society. While the feminist movement focused on liberation and equal rights for women, it was not entirely relevant to the lived experiences of Black women (Breines, 2002). The social position of Black women in American society had been defined by oppression and inequality that was enmeshment of the multiple identities that they held. Cooper (1892) validated this idea by indicating that “the colored woman of today occupies…a unique position in this country…she is confronted with both a woman question and a race problem and is yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both” (p. 134). Feminist philosophy could not account for the lived experiences specifically of Black women, and the 1960s Feminist movement excluded experiences of racism, sexism, and classism that addressed their diverse needs (Combahee River Collective Statement [CRC], 1977). There was no separation between the experiences of Black and White women leading to the assumption that all women’s experiences were the same. Traditional feminist philosophy was not entirely relevant to Black women and did not
account for the power of difference and uniqueness of their experiences. Breines (2002) argued that the White women’s movement was racist, as it was discriminatory to Black women, and it lacked a response to racism and sexism experienced by Black women. The privileges of White working-class women began to supersede the concerns of all women, leading to their concerns, such as equal pay or working outside of the home (Breines, 2002). hooks (2000) added that White women had dominated the feminist discourse, usually narrating, and articulating the needs of the group creating “…little to no understanding of White supremacy as a racial politics, of the psychological impact of class, of their political status within a racist, sexualist, capitalist state” (p. 4). Those women, who felt left out and excluded from the movement, felt the need to create a movement that was truly representative of Black women’s lived experiences. It is important to note that this is not a criticism of the monumental feminist movement. Instead, it is the foundation that led to a movement led for and by Black women.

In 1974, a small group of African American women who identified themselves as Black feminists developed the Combahee River Collective, led by Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith, to shed light on the unique experiences of Black women who differed from White women and Black men but also to define and clarify their role within politics (Breines, 2002; Taylor, 2017). Taylor (2017) stated that the CRC “was built on those observations by continuing to analyze the roots of Black women’s oppression under capitalism and arguing for the reorganization of society based on the collective needs of the most oppressed” (p. 5). The presence and acknowledgment of Black feminism was a vindication that Black women’s struggles, interpretations of their thought, and survival methods had a place in all social institutions. To highlight the omission within academia
and educational settings, Black feminist thought arises to support the inclusion of truth and meaning from a Black women’s standpoint.

**Conceptualizing Black Feminist Thought**

Conceptualizing Black feminist thought requires acknowledging that Black women are an oppressed group, and that so long as intersecting oppressions continue to exist, the need for Black feminism and Black feminist thought will continue to exist (Collins, 2000). As a critical social theory, it illustrates the complexities and ineffectiveness of the academy to acknowledge and include Black women’s unique perspectives and contributions to academia and research. In theorizing Black feminist thought and identity, the primary objective identified by Collins (2000) is to “describe, analyze, explain the significance of, and contribute to the development of Black feminist thought as a critical social theory” (p. 9). It must be built upon, reviewed, and reflected on to maintain its dynamism. From institutional practices to the development and definition of knowledge, Black women develop social thought that enables advocacy efforts and social justice movements to uncover unrealistic and false views and practices that contribute to an oppressive system (Collins, 2000).

**Distinguishing Features of Black Feminist Thought**

Black feminist thought is defined by six distinguishing features, which include: (a) the idea that Black women are an oppressed group of individuals in the United States and as a result of this oppression, tend to engage in activism; (b) Black women are facing similar challenges in the United States and globally; therefore, they are creating a collective sense of knowledge regarding oppression and resistance; (c) Black feminist thought focuses on the relationship between the lived experiences of Black women and
the mutual sense of knowledge or group standpoint to create a heterogeneous collectivity; (d) the intellectual contributions of Black women who encompass a commonplace knowledge that includes knowledge production and a specialized knowledge that comes from investigating all dimensions of the group standpoint; (e) remaining dynamic and open to change, meaning that as evolving social conditions take place, knowledge production and the practice of Black feminist theory must as well; and (f) Black feminist theory is connected to other social justice movements of human dignity and empowerment (Collins, 2000). These distinguishing features paired with core themes connect Black feminist thought as a framework to analyze lived experiences and understand the role of intersecting oppressions for Black women.

**Core Themes of Black Feminist Thought**

Collins (2000) provided seven core themes of Black feminist thought that can be linked to the experiences of Black women’s mental health. These themes include: (a) work, family, and Black women’s oppression; (b) controlling images of Black women; (c) the power of self-definition; (d) the sexual politics of Black womanhood; (e) Black women’s love relationships; (f) Black women and Black motherhood; and (g) rethinking Black women’s activism. These themes also align to address the struggles and resistance of Black women and the stereotypical characteristics that represent intersectional oppression and survival. For this study, I focused on these core themes that are most relevant to my research, which included: (a) work, family, and Black women’s oppression; (b) controlling images of Black women; (c) the power of self-definition; (d) Black women and Black motherhood; (e) the sexual politics of Black womanhood; and (f) rethinking Black women’s activism.
Work, Family, and Black Women’s Oppression

The dehumanization of Black women within society results in their low positioning within the labor market (Collins, 2000). Analyzing the labor market status of Black women provides insight into Black women’s oppression and exploitation across generations. Collins (2000) indicated that the first core theme in Black feminist thought consists of reviewing and analyzing Black women’s work, especially “Black women’s labor market victimization as “mules” …that can be treated as part of the scenery” (p. 45). The reference to mules, in this case, indicates that Black women are not to be seen as human but objects to be pushed and pulled at the will of their owners. Dehumanizing women removed the need for slave owners to pay Black women for their labor leading to the exploitation of Black women for unpaid labor. Collins (2000) explained that Black women’s unpaid work is organized within intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender. Common is the exploitation of Black women by their family system and men within the home as they devote unlimited and selfless contributions to their families’ well-being, such as keeping families together and teaching children survival skills, unpaid. The truth of “how hard” Black women work is overlooked and untold (Collins, 2000). Even though Black women are surviving paid and unpaid labor exploitation, little has been researched about its impact on their well-being and sense of agency toward change and progress. A study and analysis of how this form of oppression impacts Black women can inform academia on methods to address these lived experiences. Change can occur through curriculum and resource development and addressing systemic policies that uphold oppressive structures.
Controlling Images of Black Women

Controlling images of Black women are designed to make intersecting oppression and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life. Snider (2018) explained that controlling images are “problematic in the sense that they are ubiquitous and capable of creating a false authentic persona of even the most esteemed individuals” (p. 14). It is “a major instrument of power, elite groups, in exercising power, [that] manipulate ideas about Black womanhood” (Snider, 1208, p. 69). Manipulated ideas and data about Black women remove Black women’s ability to be in control of their images and depiction in society (Hein, 2017). Historically, there has been a wealth of information on Black women provided by statistics and data on topics such as “teen pregnancy, broken homes, unwed mothers, and welfare dependency” (Collins, 2015, p. 2349) that has been manipulated “within other peoples’ preconceived frameworks about social problems” (Collins, 2015, p. 2349). White researchers and academics have taken data and produced false narratives and representations in a manner that is about Black women but not for Black women. This has also created negative images of Black women who had to be dismantled by Black women themselves. General images of Black women have included Black mammies, domestic servants, sexualized bodies, Jezebels, and field workers (Collins, 2000; Shorter-Gooden, 2004). A one-sided, socially constructed image as angry, unfeminine, and sexualized that has left Black women and girls attempting to balance the true identity of Black womanhood. Hein (2017) insisted that the idealistic view of Black women being “unique, complex, and nuanced” (p. 1) rejects this position for a more representative, inclusive, and heterogenous view, including attorneys, healthcare workers, mothers, and scholars.
Collins (2000) noted that Black women have been punished for their resistance with negative stereotypical images such as “hoochie,” “mammy,” or “matriarch” to limit their social standing. This punishment perpetuates long-standing views that Black women are undeserving of acknowledgment, worth, and dignity within academia and society.

The advocacy of Black women against racism and inequality is characterized by assertiveness and vitality. It serves as a direct threat to the status quo that has been created by dominant ideology (Collins, 2000). Collins (2000) wrote that “portraying African American women as stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas helps justify U.S. Black women’s oppression” (p. 69). These images are seen throughout television, social media, movies, music, and within social institutions. Their presence in these areas exhibits how images are interwoven, promoted, and supported in society. From this perspective, those within the field of education can be encouraged to resist and reject the controlling images to shed the limitations that exist for Black women. Educators of all forms can embrace the truths of Black women by including the many academic and non-academic works of Black women in their courses and have true representation within the classrooms. The knowledge and work of Black women can be made visible within academia, and their voices will amplify in truth and accuracy.

**Black Women and Black Motherhood**

Black motherhood has been a significant aspect of Black women and their families’ lives. Collins (2000) states that Black motherhood has been glorified within the Black community as the self-sacrificing backbone of their family systems. Unconditional love, nurturing, and devotion are provided by Black mothers; however, Collins (2000)
argues that this glorification highlights the positive image of motherhood and overshadows the sacrifices that Black women make for their families. A controlling image exists among Black mothers that describes them as strong, Black women who exhibit resiliency and infinite strength in the most stressful and challenging times (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Collins, 2000). There is a perception that if Black women were to indicate difficulty managing stressful situations or place their needs before others, they would be categorized as “bad mothers” (Collins, 2000). Therefore, Black women will stifle their suffering and continue to self-sacrifice their needs to uphold an image of a strong, Black mother (Collins, 2000).

Beginning in slavery, Black mothers were pushed away from their maternal instinct to care for, raise, and nurture their children as they were forced to work in fields and for slave masters (Lee, 2017). The relational ties between families were broken as mothers, fathers, and children were separated from one another. While the separation was forced upon Black families, Black mothers continued to be stereotyped as absentee mothers by society (Lee, 2017; Morgan, 2018). This stereotype of Black mothers has categorized them as “…frequently out of their homes and away from their children” and has supported the controlling image of Black mothers as mammies and matriarchs as a form of oppression (Collins, 2000; Lee, 2017). Morgan (2018) argues that Black mothers have attempted to regain control of this damaging narrative only to note that there is limited visibility of positive images of Black motherhood in society. Morgan (2018) indicates the image of the Madonna has represented the perfect and idolized version of motherhood within the dominant culture; however, this representation historically has excluded Black mothers. Morgan (2018) indicates that “while the centerpiece of Western
womanhood is the Madonna figure – a figure to cherished and protected – there has been no significant framework in which a Black Madonna can emerge” (p.858). Despite these controlling images, Collins (2000) indicates that Black women find motivation in motherhood to resist these narrates and engage in activism and self-definition. Collins (2000) argues that Black women must create new images and definitions of motherhood and view motherhood as a symbol of power to resist the deficit-based narrative that continues to oppress them.

**The Power of Self-Definition**

Self-defining is a critical aspect of Black women’s resistance to misrepresentations and controlling images and directly works to contradict the stereotypes of Black women (Snider, 2018). Black women’s work and family experiences create the conditions whereby the contradictions between everyday experiences and the controlling images of Black womanhood become visible (Collins, 2000). Black women can recreate and redefine their self-images through the personal storytelling of work and family experiences. The truths of these experiences are accurate renditions and interpretations of how Black women survive interlocking oppressions through self-definition. Snider (2018) contended that it is imperative for “Black women to understand what we are capable of when we self-define” (p. 13), indicating that self-definition is critical for survival, interpersonal development, and resistance to control images and oppression. Behavioral conformity became a mechanism for survival in that; Black women had a dual consciousness for both the use of language and assaults of the oppressor while still maintaining a Black feminist standpoint (Collins, 2000). Noting that this conformity must not be confused with complacency or silence but as a method of
surviving the social conditions of oppression, bell hooks (1986) contended that “to speak then when one was not spoken to was a courageous act – an act of risk and daring” (p. 123). Speaking then is an oppositional stance to oppression and an act of resistance towards liberation. Recognized as a skillful deflection of psychological attacks on Black women’s identity, a hidden space of consciousness provided a method of coping that led to the finding of voice to express a collective, self-defined Black women’s standpoint (Collins, 2000).

Defining and giving meaning to experiences for themselves is liberating and transformative in developing a space for survival. In support of the self-definition, Lorde (1984) wrote, “if I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive” (p.137), thus highlighting the impact of not refraining from Black women’s individual and group meaning-making and efforts of self-definition. Finding a communal voice developed by Black women who offer a space for spiritual, emotional, and physical safety is identified by Collins (2000) as “a necessary condition for Black women’s resistance” (p.100). Self-defining spaces include relationships between other women of African diasporas, literature, and music. Snider (2018) argued that self-definition is not about proving oneself to others and allies, but that self-defining is meant for Black women to “express themselves authentically and realistically” (p. 15) and without fear of repercussion. The power of self-definition will further serve as a healing and survival technique in countering the pain and suffering that can negatively impact Black women’s mental health.
Rethinking Black Women’s Activism

Marked by Black women’s survival of intersecting oppression and resistance to ideological justifications, activism is a core theme of Black feminist thought. Collins (2000) contended that Black women have a unique perspective and understanding of activism and resistance due to their inclusion within social justice movements and their exclusion from history regarding these movements. Historically, Black women have survived racial, and class oppression through resisting controlling images, and Collins (2000) argued that surviving oppression is an act of resistance, making it a form of activism. Rejecting controlling images through self-definition and engaging in the unexpected action of speaking up disrupts the dominant ideology that has attempted to keep Black women oppressed and silenced. While Black feminist thought highlights the work of Black women’s individual survival, group survival must be accounted for within activism and is notably “just as important as confrontations with institutional power” (Collins, 2000, p. 202). The group survival of Black women and collectivity is an integral part of activism due to its role in the struggles to transform United States social institutions, including the educational setting. Nayak (2017) noted that the activism of Black feminist theory arises of out both “the very oppression it seeks to confront” and “the collective engagement with struggles for social justice” (p. 2). Encouraging Black women to collectively define activism allows for their everyday life struggles to be challenged and for their strengths and progress to be supported (Collins, 2000). Self-valuation, self-definition, and resistance employ Black women’s group survival and activism by challenging oppressive structures and rejecting objectification, ultimately contradicting the harmful ideas placed upon them by dominant society.
Sexual Politics of Black Womanhood

Sexuality serves as another distinct social concept to consider when focusing on the impact of intersecting oppressions on Black women’s experiences. In describing sexual politics, Collins (2000) stated that “sexuality can be analyzed as a freestanding system of oppression similar to oppressions of race, class, and gender” (p. 128). The linkage to power and sexuality as a construct of Black women’s sexuality offers that heterosexism is a powerful and victimizing form of oppression. The narrative of Black women’s sexuality is primarily controlled by social institutions such as schools, churches, and the media, leading to the suppression of their collective voice and is characterized by secrecy, sexual victimization, and hyper-sexualization (Collins, 2000). This silence has been encouraged by society, and Black women have been discouraged from analyzing the topic of sexuality, gender, and race so that dominant society can continuously deny Black women equal treatment under the law. The sexuality of Black women is either ignored or included in issues relevant to Black men (Collins, 2000). When included in issues relevant to Black men, Black women are juxtaposed against them and characterized as Jezebels and “hoochie mamas” deserving of the violence against their bodies. These ideas are contradicted by Black women; however, with the continued upholding of silence and “taboo” views of Black women’s sexuality, these persist across social institutions.

Key Characteristics of Black Feminist Thought

The Politics of Empowerment

Defining multiple realities and rejecting prevailing knowledge about Black women’s experiences serve two distinct purposes of significance for advancing Black feminist thought. Black women’s lives, thoughts, and ideas are brought to the forefront to
address power relations in society and academia. To create spaces of safety for Black women so that they may support sharing and acknowledging their experiences, the power structures that perpetuate oppression must be disrupted. Collins (2000) argued that to operate as a critical social theory for Black feminist activism, the theory must not only provide directions on how to achieve this, but it must also redefine politics and empowerment. This is complete by understanding “how power is organized and operates” (Collins, 2000, p. 274) within a matrix of domination to reach a Black consciousness movement. This matrix of domination introduced by Collins (1989) examines the systemic organization of oppression to control and marginalize non-White members of society. The matrix of domination is defined as the method of analysis of power structures that inform society and the way the interrelated domains of power: (a) structural, (b) disciplinary, (c) hegemonic, and (d) interpersonal, can be disrupted to stimulate dialogues about Black women’s empowerment (Collins, 2000).

First, the structural domain of power upholds and organizes oppressive structures within society. According to Alinia (2015), Black feminism “raises and discusses the relationship between the structural, ideological, and everyday aspects of domination and their subjective and symbolic violence about the individual and collective struggles within a matrix of domination” (pp. 2335-2336). The structural domain insists that the reproduction of Black women’s subordination occurs within large-scale institutions, such as educational settings where Black women are left out of leadership positions, tenured faculty, and overused by institutions (West, 2019).

Next, the hegemonic domain justifies oppression in four areas, including: (a) ideology, (b) culture, (c) knowledge, and (d) consciousness (Alinia, 2015; Collins, 1989).
Black women have been objectified and silenced throughout history and the intellectual community has created perceived homogeneity among the group (Collins, 2000). Collins (1989) insisted that “the standpoints of the oppressed group are discredited and suppressed by the more powerful in that self-defined standpoints can stimulate the oppressed groups to resist their domination” (p. 749). In support of countering the past perspective of homogeneous lives, Collins (2015) argued that Black women live heterogeneous lives that are complex and unconfined to the limited understanding of Black female culture and livelihood. To support this perspective, one must be willing to also create complex understandings of the diversity of experiences by Black women to contradict patterns and trends within academia that are based on homogenous thinking.

Black feminist thought uncovers how “domination is organized and operates in the various domains of power” (Alinia, 2015, p. 2335). Alinia (2015) explained that this involves analyzing the third domain of power, disciplinary, which “manages oppression and power relations through rules and regulations… and aims to produce ‘quiet, orderly, docile, and disciplined populations “(p. 2336). Creating a new, re-narrated view of the role of power asserts that academia must come to new conclusions about the validity of beliefs, experiences, and knowledge of Black women and that they are appropriately interwoven into our society. Dismantling the disciplinary domain of power places Black women back in control of their stories, according to their truths.

Lastly, the interpersonal domain of power is what influences our daily lived experiences and “how individual consciousness ensues” (Collins, 2000, p. 287). Mainstream scholarship suggests that there is a tendency to “canonize a few Black women as spokespersons for the group and then refuse to listen to any but the select
few,” allowing for only partial recognition of the power that they hold (Collins, 2000, p. viii). Collins (1989) explained that the:

Everyday acts of resistance challenge two prevailing approaches to studying the consciousness of oppressed groups. One approach claims that the subordinate groups identify with the powerful and have no valid independent interpretation of their own oppression. The second approach assumes that the oppressed are less human than their rulers and, therefore, are less capable of articulating their own standpoint. (pp.744-745)

Black women are forced to accept observant and subservient positions within White-dominated institutions. With only observant positions in society, the undertone suggests that Black women must accept oppressive systems because they are incapable of achieving and advocating independently. Further, it suggests that these are the only positions available to Black women; therefore, they must accept them. To reject this, Black women must find and use a voice of resistance that stands “as a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life, and new growth possible” (hooks, 1986, p. 128). It is a movement towards liberation for Black women.

**Remaining Dynamic by Addressing Limitations of BFT**

Although progress has been made towards the recognition of Black women’s experiences, Collins (2000) explained that there is a continued struggle to sustain this progress due to the ongoing rejection of Black women’s knowledge and realities as a viable, theoretical perspective within academia. Cooper (2015) explained that despite having a strong theoretical basis, Black feminism is continuously subjected to “a “culture of justification” in which one is always asked to prove that the study of Black women’s
lives, history, literature, cultural production, and theory is sufficiently “rigorous” to merit academic resources” (p. 7). Scholars choosing to utilize Black feminist theory are met with increased pressure to prove that their intellectual products are rigorous and have a place in academia. In fact, Collins (2000) explained that Black feminist thought is not attractive to non-using intellectuals, which are made up of members of dominant society, Black men, and even Black women. I assert that Black feminist thought must be used more often within the academy, not to justify its use but to highlight that the unique, lived experiences of Black women deserve acknowledgment and a home within social institutions.

The collective experiences of Black women are crucial to enhancing the visibility of work and recognizing that knowledge can be gained through experience and not solely through intellectual thought. Society must be cautious not to frame Black feminism solely as an anti-racist intervention meant to dismantle oppression but one that also has an ethical commitment to liberation and knowledge production across disciplines and fields (Cooper, 2015). The movement is not a representation or generalization of all Black woman’s experiences and views, but rather it is the development of the group standpoint that acknowledges the similarity of Black women’s experiences and responses to oppression. Black feminist scholars argued that the very pressure to prove its worthiness as a theoretical framework within institutions is the same form of oppression they seek to dismantle. Another critique of Black feminism theory is that it is too exclusive to Black women and too divisive and undermines the overall movement for women’s rights and civil rights. I contend that this critique is common and reminiscent of the assumption that Black women's actions and work are always done in excess or “doing too much.” I
support the notion that liberatory practice, policies, and thought are relied on to gain inclusivity within academia and professional work, to achieve equity, and to obtain cultural paradigm shifts. For Black women advocating for visibility and inclusion of their wisdom and knowledge among society, the assumption of “doing too much” is an attempt to devalue and discredit Black feminism.

Black women benefit from theoretical frameworks based on centering their unique experiences. Black feminist theory favors women of the African diasporas whose lives have been impacted by the intersecting oppressions of society. Acknowledging the existence of Black women’s group standpoints allows Black women in society to encourage activism and acts of resistance that break down the systems of oppression and inspire desire-based research and activities. Adult education can be transformed by including critical theories, such as Black feminist thought, and a more profound and valued understanding of Black women’s experiences and diverse intellectual contributions is possible.

**Overview of Endarkened Feminism**

For this study, I drew on endarkened feminist epistemology to connect the meaning of spirituality to the meaning-making of experiences for Black women. Dillard (2000) used the term *endarkened* “to disrupt oppressive language and transform the language used to understand the mental, spiritual, and intellectual epistemologies of marginalized peoples through various culturally constructed contexts” (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021, p. 3). Endarkened feminism is a way of knowing that centers Black women’s experiences (Dillard, 2000).
Dillard (2006) provided the origins of endarkened feminist epistemology and the significance of creating and locating “endarkened” epistemological understandings, which challenge the colonized views of knowledge, language, and meaning making for Black women of the African diaspora. Endarkened feminist theory provides an approach to situate the interpersonal and collective experiences of racism and spiritual coping of mental health for Black women. Dillard’s (2000) coinage of endarkened feminism is the extension of Black feminist thought that is based on the historical roots of global Black feminist theory. Endarkened feminism is supported as a response to the lack of acknowledgment and centrality of Black women’s experiences, race, gender, and culture. It also emphasizes the role of spirit and spirituality as a valid aspect of our lives. Dillard (2016b) argued that endarkened feminist epistemology is, “a catalyst for thinking about a vision/version of feminisms that, for diasporic Black women, might open a way to (re)member our identities, lives, and work as Black women” (p. 406). To put back together these aspects of Black womanhood means to connect their ways of knowing into relationships, reflections, and resistance in spaces dedicated to and for Black women. The space for dialogue and healing is honored through sharing their purpose and showing up to survive intersecting oppression. With a strong foundation in Black feminist thought, Dillard (2006, 2016a, 2016b) explained endarkened feminism as an epistemological approach that does not only focus on the knowledge production process but is also concerned with the spiritual journey of uncovering and constructing truths from lived experiences. It is a process in which Black women must “learn to listen with the body, mind, and spirit and not privilege our minds or personalities” (Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2011, p. 70).
An Endarkened Process of (Re)membering our Stories to Heal

Dillard (2006, 2016a, 2016b) contended that Black women connect with past experiences as a way of finding meaning in their current experiences. The act of (re)membering is the non-linear process of putting back together one’s identity that is interwoven between Africa and the United States. Dillard (2016b) described the act of (re)membering as the transnational and global endarkened feminist process of: (a) (re)searching, (b) (re)visioning, (c) (re)cognizing, (d) (re)presenting, and (e) (re)claiming that enables us to shift our gaze to the process of finding meaning and seeing who we are as individuals. Dillard (2016b) described this process as what leads Black women to ask questions and think critically about the approaches to inquiry and teaching. First, (re)searching is defined as:

the process of seeking, looking, and searching for something that is a part of Black culture that we believe will teach us something new and provide vision about ourselves and life. It is possible that during this process, we are changed as individuals and that there is significant personal growth. The act of (re)visioning is explained as “the expansion of our current worldview…and involves an awakening of what we hear, touch, feel, and intuit, and the spiritual nature of the evidence of things unseen. (Dillard, 2016b, p. 411)

It involves looking beyond what individuals currently hold as their worldview and becoming awakened to the new beginnings. (Re)cognizing involves manifesting a change in mind and thoughts with shifts of the heart and emotions (Dillard, 2016b). This will include the identity, accomplishments, and intellect of Black people shifting as we learn more about ourselves. (Re)presenting is a process of (re)membering that involves
“literally putting ourselves and our understanding of Black identities, notions of Black womanhood, and culture in the world in new and fuller ways” (Dillard, 2016b, p. 411). Lastly, the process of (re)claiming is the part of the process “that involves going back (and forward) to claim the legacy” (Dillard, 2016b, p. 411) of Black people and find space and a place within that legacy.

(Re)membering to Heal from Oppression

(Re)membering is sharing stories as gifts to one another to hope that the healing process is engaged in while providing others with a glimpse of pain, survival, dreams, and hopes (Dillard, 2000; Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2011). The healing process is a remarkable aspect of meaning-making and personal growth from intersectional oppression. The use of Black and endarkened feminism as theoretical foundations “intentionally acts as a strategy that gets to the heart of those inequalities suffered by Black women (Evans et al., 2017, p. 206). The process of reconciliation and healing from deep wounds and adversity are unique to Black women and theories that center Black women’s experiences of coping and healing. Evans et al. (2017) contended that with the exploration of finding meaning for experiences through spiritual practices and other coping mechanisms, Black women can learn “to heal and strengthen their bodies, as well as their minds, and [can empower] other Black women” (p. 141).

Dillard (2016) argued that endarkened feminism illustrates “both the desire and need to (re)member” (p. 407) for Black people. That desire is uncovered during the development and practice of spirituality as Black women begin to find purpose and meaning from their experiences. Spirituality is a focal point of Black women’s experiences and “serves as a source of faith which enables Black women to remain on
life’s course, in spite of obstacles” (Heath, 2006, p. 162). Spirituality’s inclusion in the healing and coping process for Black women is necessary and interconnected.

**Spirituality, (Re)membering, and Black Women**

The epistemology of endarkenment feminism asserts that research, specifically for Black and African American women, will include a process of spirituality. Both Black feminist theory and endarkened feminism argue that spirituality is a valued tool for agency and resistance and should be acknowledged as a valid category of analysis and processing (Agyepong, 2011). Agyepong (2011) noted that many Black feminists recognize the place of spirituality in the history and liberation of women. Dillard (2016b) asserted that spirituality and research should not be separate in the quest to solve problems within communities through research. The definition of spirituality is vague and difficult to place into a box; however, Dillard (2016b) explained that “spirituality is to have a consciousness of the realm of the spirit in one’s work and recognized that consciousness is a transformative force in research and teaching” (p.407). It is undefined for the individual yet understood as a collectivity. Spirituality is the inner connectedness, meaning, and purpose of life. According to Agyepong (2011), spirituality “is waking up in the morning and giving thanks to your creator for the opportunity to live another day, guide, provide, and be with you through the good and bad things that come with it” (p. 178). An important aspect of spirituality is the involvement of consciousness. Consciousness is the choice to build and sustain a relationship with a higher or divine being and is what allows individuals to participate and cope with the social and political struggles of society (Dillard, 2016a). The consciousness and spirituality combine to create a way of knowing and being deeply invested in Black women's self.
The development of ones’ spirit and use of spirituality “is a protective factor in the context of a variety of adversities” (Kaufman et al., 2020, p. 401) such as experiences of intersectional oppression. Spirituality offers a sense of belonging, value, understanding and comfort that there are shared experiences of life and pain (Evans et al., 2017; Heath, 2006). The individual search for meaning and divine purpose within Black women’s spirit is a part of the practice of (re)membering and coping through experiences of pain, rejection, and hurt. McClish-Boyd and Bhattacharya (2021) noted that the relationship between Black women and “spirituality is complex and sometimes might cause harm, [however] it is still a relevant and embodied way…[that] Black women construct their narratives of struggle, survival, success, and agency” (p.11). The uncovered meaning and purpose provide a sense of direction and guidance that enables Black women to navigate intersectional oppression safely and healthily (Dillard, 2006; Heath, 2006). The use of spirituality in this study acknowledged that Black women’s relationship with a higher being or the divine is a large part of their coping and healing process (Dillard, 2016b Heath, 2006; Kaufman et al., 2020). The inclusion and exploration of the role of spirituality in Black women’s experiences of mental health and healing in this research study is an attempt to ensure that the elements of healing through the meaning making of complex events are valued for their positive outcomes on mental health. Dillard (2000) stated that “spirituality is intimately interwoven into the ethos of an endarkened Black feminist epistemology’ (p. 672); therefore, it cannot be omitted in the process of understanding how Black women heal.
**Intersectional Oppression and Black Women’s Lived Experiences**

Cho et al. (2013) stated that in the 1980s, the term *intersectionality* was introduced to bring attention to the “vexed dynamics of difference and the solidarities of sameness in the context of anti-discrimination and social movement politics” (p. 787). Crenshaw (1990) coined the term *intersectionality* to describe how the systems of oppression intersect and overlap to a unique set of experiences for people with multiple identity categories, including race, class, sexuality, disability, and gender. Intersectional oppression and subordination are dimensions of disempowerment that have marginalized women within society's multiple locations, such as mental health, education, and academia (Crenshaw, 1990). The erasure of Black women’s truths and misrepresented healing practices result from intersectional oppressions. Erasure and misrepresentation are methods that oppressive institutions continuously work to keep Black women in subordinate conditions and places based solely on their multiple identities. Using an intersectional lens can aid in identifying how systems of oppression can converge to create experiences for Black women who are rooted in insubordination and domination.

In analyzing and describing the mental health and healing experiences of Black women, an intersectional approach can further offer insight into the multiple ways that experiences of race, class, gender, and sexuality can impact Black women’s functioning by highlighting the uniqueness of these realities. McGibbon and McPherson (2013) contended that Black women “experience the mental stress of oppressions such as racism, misogyny, and ageism, and the unjust policies that create and sustain poverty, they are impacted persistently over time” (p. 63). Therefore, focusing on the role of intersecting oppressions on Black women’s mental health can provide understanding into the lived
experiences of Black women’s survival and healing as they operate within the margins of society.

**Mental Health and the Experiences of Intersecting Oppressions**

The complex and busy nature of Black women’s lived experiences and role can impact their mental health and emotional well-being. Black women are more likely than White American women to report feelings of sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness, or that everything is an effort all the time (Abrams et al., 2019; Jones & Guy-Sheftall, 2015; Woods-Gibscome et al., 2016). Experiences of discrimination, sexism, racism, and erasure can all contribute to increased stress levels and depression in Black women. Black women encounter psychological distress due to their historically determined structural, cultural, and familial positions in the United States (Jones & Guy-Sheftall, 2015; Woods-Giscombé et al., 2016). It becomes overwhelmingly challenging to manage these situations and distress due to the severity and frequency of experiences related to intersecting oppressions. Martins et al. (2017) noted that experiences such as “intentional or non-intentional verbal or behavioral verbal abuse, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative offenses towards a person or a target group” (p. 2794) could contribute to increased levels of stress. The repercussions of these experiences also lead to heightened anxiety, feelings of dread, low self-esteem, or feeling less than a woman (Heath, 2006).

With the rates of mental health struggles disproportionately rising, society must take steps to provide resources and education that privilege the experiences of Black women. However, this is not the case generally within the mental health and education field. Despite the data to justify a shift in thinking, academic and mental health
professionals still struggle to meet the many needs of Black women (Jones & Guy-Sheftall, 2015; West, 2019). This is not to imply that Black women should be victimized or seen as incapable of coping with difficult emotions, but I assert that Black women’s experiences of mental health are non-existent and not well provided to. Boyd-Franklin (2010) argued that spiritual inclusivity in mental health “has contributed to the resiliency of African Americans in coping with the psychological pain of racism, discrimination, and oppression” (p. 979). Black women are indeed surviving their intersecting oppressions, but at what cost to their mental health?

Concerns about judgmental barriers and the stigma of shame and embarrassment for needing help are factors in Black women not seeking out mental health support and are barriers for treatment and help-seeking (Floyd, 2020). Floyd (2020) explained that in addition to the social stigma surrounding mental health, there is also “a dearth of appropriate providers, financial concerns, and unique stresses. Black women face that are poorly understood in treatment circles” (p. 34). Jordan-Zachery (2017) explained that not only has mental health and mental illness been invisible and left unaddressed within the Black community, but society has identified the topic as “taboo” and nonexistent. These challenges can serve as barriers to Black women seeking treatment and support. The lack of services and understanding of the Black women’s perspective contributes to poor cultural attunement and culturally responsive services (Floyd, 2020; Jones & Guy-Sheftall, 2015). This is present with a lack of services and providers and in the academic literature and education that informs mental health practice. Utilizing a Black feminist perspective and intersectional lens to mental health and educational research can then be
representative of the everyday struggles related to mental health within the Black community.

**The Concept of the Strong Black Woman**

As a response to the intersecting oppression experienced by Black women since slavery, the Strong Black Woman (SBW) concept has arisen as a method to survive the adverse emotions and traumatic stress experienced. The SBW is a maladaptive coping mechanism to life stressors but also a misrepresentation of Black women’s ability to experience pain and emotion within society. Abrams (2019) described the phenomenon of the SBW as “an amalgamation of beliefs and cultural expectations of incessant resilience, independence, and strength that guide meaning making, cognition, and behavior related to Black womanhood” (pp. 517-518). Woods-Gibscome (2016) argues that SBW also is significant to Black motherhood because the roles of the family caregiver and suggests that Black mothers are the backbone of their families. Floyd (2020) also contended that the SBW syndrome “often arises because Black women who need support are not offered any” (p. 36) due to a false belief that they are able to manage the multiple roles and intersecting oppressions on their own. Black women hold the belief that strength must always be exhibited, and everything that is thrown in their direction must be handled by them only, independently. With the identified cultural ideals and representations of balancing multiple roles and experiences that impact psychological distress, SBW does not have positive health outcomes for women. Instead, it is a contributing risk factor to deteriorated mental and physical health outcomes (Abrams et al., 2019; Woods-Giscombé et al., 2016). Nichols, Gringle, and Pringle (2015) describe the caregiver role associated with SBW as “…stressful – in part because of the demands
and the high expectations placed on them by family – and a barrier to self-care” (p. 169). Black women will sacrifice their wellness and self-care habits to portray an image of strength and pride (Collins, 2000; Nichols et al., 2015).

As Black women attempt to rationalize the oppression faced in their lives, they glorify their resilience and strength yet omit to acknowledge the emotional struggles of these experiences where help must be sought out. The avoidance of these emotions creates a mask of false coping ability in which an image of strength is portrayed. Abrams et al. (2019) explained that the SBW schema is characterized by a hesitancy to seek tangible and intangible support, poor emotional and needs expression, and difficulty embracing and exhibiting vulnerability. Referred to also as the superwoman schema, Woods-Giscombé et al. (2016) described a similar set of characteristics that are visible within the group standpoint. Woods-Giscombé et al. (2016) explained the characteristics as:

An obligation to present an image of strength, an obligation to suppress emotions, resistance to being vulnerable or dependent on others, determination to succeed despite a lack of resources, and an obligation to help others instead of prioritizing selfcare. (p. 1130)

The presentation and underlying assumptions that Black women are superior in both physical and emotional weakness yet immune to harsh conditions and pain perpetuate a false narrative that an acknowledgment of mental health concerns is not necessary or relevant to the field (Abrams et al., 2019; Stanton et al., 2017; Woods-Giscombé et al., 2016). The expectation of Black women is that, as a group, they can manage stressful situations and intersecting oppressions with no limitations.
Misrepresentations of Black Women’s Mental Health

The perception of impenetrable strength and immunity to painful experiences removes Black women’s humanity. It denies the reality that Black women are emotionally susceptible to mental health struggles at the hands of oppressive mechanisms. In this instance, SBW and the superwoman schema perpetuate the misrepresentations of Black women’s experiences of mental health and their methods of survival. Dominant ideology insists, through deficit informed thinking, Black women either lack the ability to feel emotional or physical pain or that there is no need for help due to their past experiences of navigating difficult experiences and oppression through survival (Evans et al., 2017). Black women’s strength should not be seen as solely a negative risk factor for mental health. According to Stanton et al. (2017), “Black women’s access to “strength” is often perceived as a defining characteristic of their womanhood and, furthermore, a means for survival” (p. 466). It is beneficial to have feelings of untouchable strength to manage the intense emotions and consequences of oppression. However, the constant need and attempts of Black women to survive on their own can push them beyond their limits both emotionally and physically. Identifying and naming how Black women are surviving their mental health experiences using healthy coping mechanisms such as spirituality and community can encourage more Black women to evoke that same wisdom and process in their journeys of healing (Floyd, 2020). Black women will be empowered to tap into their strength and wisdom to continue to dismantle oppressive structures.
Dismantling the Notions of Mental Health

An analysis of the mental health and educational issues from a Black feminist perspective is not just an empowered theory for Black women; it also allows for the interrogation and restructuring of the controlling ideology that impacts an entire spectrum and intersection of issues for Black women. To dismantle the deficit notions and false representations, the truths of mental health and healing must be uncovered through the words and stories of Black women. An inclusive and representative understanding of these experiences is possible to achieve with the collaboration of Black women. Within the mental health and educational setting, the interpretations of Black women’s experiences of mental health have been completed without Black women (Abrams et al., 2018; West, 2019). To privilege the lived experiences of Black women from a spiritual perspective serves as an act of resistance to the misrepresentation of Black women and is necessary to disrupt an oppressive system. A continuation of educational misconceptions regarding Black women’s healing and truths of mental health will continue to silence Black women, ultimately resulting in their growing invisibility. New narratives are necessary to dismantle these notions to create truth, and intricate and unfiltered representations for all to witness.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I discuss my research approach, narrative inquiry informed by Black feminist theory, to capture the unfragmented and thick descriptions of Black women’s lived experiences through life stories, unstructured interviews, and daughtering. I will start with a brief review of Black feminist epistemology and its suitability for this study. My research positionality will be explored as an essential aspect of acknowledging how I came to the questions directing this research. Lastly, I will provide a brief overview of my data collection and data analysis strategies – daughtering – and end with my study's ethics and research quality.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the narratives of Black women’s mental health and methods of spiritual healing. I used Collins’ (1995, 2000) Black feminist theory to conceptualize the lived experiences of Black women, their mental health, and how Black women navigate these experiences toward spiritual healing. My research study aimed to disrupt traditional paradigms of the experiences of Black women’s mental health and healing methods based on deficit-driven ideology by using Black feminist epistemology. Black feminism encompasses the multiple truths that Black women hold and encourages those truths to be shared through dialogue, relationships, community, and meaning.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided my study were:

1. How do Black women understand, process, and narrate their experiences and meanings of mental health?
a. What role does the misrepresentations of Black women’s mental health have on the mental health of the participants of the study?

2. What are Black women’s methods of spiritual healing in terms of mental health?

These research questions addressed the need for an increased understanding of Black women's lived experiences as they navigate political and systemic attacks that impact mental health. Black feminist theory furthers the knowledge production related to their experiences and healing methods and rearticulates the Black woman’s standpoint regarding mental health and intersecting oppressions. The process of survival for Black women who face mental health struggles in the face of intersecting oppressions is the understanding that is needed to encourage the evolution of Black feminist theory as an alternative epistemology. The process of survival is explored within the research questions, and emphasis is placed on the narrative's authenticity.

**Black Feminist Epistemology**

Black women hold a set of experiences and truths that benefit from qualitative inquiries that center on their experiences and address the marginalization of Black women’s voices (Evans-Winters, 2019). Black feminist methodology is ideal for contextualizing and analyzing Black women’s lives and experiences for the creation of space and acknowledgment that we are the creators of our truths. It is a form of resistance to traditional methodologies and mainstream society that have historically and systemically held in place oppressive structures that have described Black women as inferior and subordinate. This critical paradigm allows for the dissection of social and economic injustices faced by oppressed and subordinate groups (Collins, 1989). Black
feminist theory provides a framework for understanding the past and current experiences of Black women and the methods to gather, analyze, and interpret such data.

There is a need for research that privileges and brings visibility to Black women's experiences that create knowledge based on the various truths and meanings of Black women as an oppressed group. The mental health of Black women, which is a subjugated topic, has been primarily defined by elite, White male-dominated epistemologies, and dominant culture in which the experiences of Black women have been erased (Collins, 2000; Heath, 2006). Research based on Black women’s daily lived experiences is necessary for identifying the modes of survival for Black women. Identifying the ways of survival against oppression and (mis)representation provides insight and the coping methods for existing in spaces that are unwelcoming of Black women’s thoughts and managing expectations of superhuman strength. Next, Black feminist theory is dynamic and must remain open to change (Cooper, 2015). As events occur, the knowledge and practices that pertain to these events must be updated. The lived experiences of Black women’s mental health will offer understanding into the thoughts and standpoints of Black women during this time. Researchers can then develop methods and teaching strategies to help resist oppression and survive during changing social conditions (Collins, 2000). Lastly, the use of Black feminist theory assists in removing the limits of knowledge production and the assumptions that Black feminism as theory is an intervention rather than a contributing critical social theory. Cooper (2015) argued that “theory-building has to be part and parcel of our world-making” (p. 19) and insisted that when creating space as a field of inquiry, there are no boundaries. The development of
theoretical perspectives can be rooted in narratives, stories, and proverbs that come to assist and nourish the lives of marginalized peoples (Christian, 1988) like Black women.

**Key Ideas of Black Feminist Epistemology**

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge and investigates the standards by which one determines what is truth and knowledge and why that belief exists (Collins, 2000). Black feminist epistemology is constructed out of necessity to account for the concerns of Black feminists that Black women’s experiences and realities as an oppressed group are unique. A specific set of criteria are required in assessing knowledge claims and the knowledge validation process for those with uniquely shared experiences. Black feminist epistemology is built upon experiential, material bases that acknowledge the collective experiences and wisdom of Black women (Collins, 2000). Collins (1989) argued that the “four dimensions of Black feminist epistemology – lived experience as a criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue, the ethic of personal accountability, and the ethics of caring” (p. 266) are the foundation of Black feminist epistemology and engage Black women in the dialogue and narration about their lives, experiences, and realities. This section describes each epistemological tenet in-depth and its application to my research.

**Lived Experience as a Criterion of Meaning**

The first tenet of Black feminist epistemology is based on the notion that lived experiences serve as a criterion for determining credibility and evidence of personal understanding. Black feminist research is centered on the direct experiences that bring knowledge and wisdom together for Black women, thus creating the opportunity for a pathway of understanding and clarity towards Black women’s truths. Black women’s subjectivity is placed at the forefront of epistemology and not upon the objective and
disconnected rationale that further perpetuates a deficit-minded framework for practice and application. Collins (2000) explained that “for most African-American women, these individuals who have lived through experiences about which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read and thought about such experiences” (p. 257). During the study, I reflected on and shared my lived experiences with the participants as an act of joining the participants in the research process to aid in building trust and co-creating the meaning of their narratives. This was beneficial as it helped in the relational process, allowing the participants to be open to sharing.

I focused on the lived experiences of Black women in my research questions by emphasizing the value of personal narratives and truths. When emphasizing personal narratives, Collins (1989) noted that “the narrative method requires that the story be told and not torn apart in the analysis, and trusted as a core belief, not admired as science” (p. 760). Interviews were most beneficial in capturing and centering the lived experiences of my participants. I decreased the formality of an “interview” and encouraged conversation to create a safe space for speaking about personal and emotional experiences (see Patterson et al., 2016). My interview guide (see Appendix B) encouraged open dialogue for participants to share freely. When collecting data, a narrative approach emphasizes understanding life events that are connected to current events. To use lived experience to identify and assess how Black women navigate intersecting oppressions, the dynamic component of wisdom as a type of knowledge is acknowledged. There was an intense focus on analyzing the stories and narratives that heighten my participants’ truths fully and without separation or redaction of their words. I was careful not to emphasize
furthering disciplinary knowledge but instead on the wisdom that serves as a necessary aspect of Black women’s survival as an oppressed group.

**The Use of Dialogue**

The use of dialogue is the second distinguishing feature of this epistemological approach. The production of knowledge occurs through the lived experiences of Black women, and thus the expression and communication of those experiences occur using collective dialogue. Collins (2000) advocated for “the use of dialogue rather than adversarial debate” in that dialogue is considered as talk between two individuals rather than subject and object positioning (p. 262). Dialogue moves past the basic forms of separated communication and encourages the listening and responding of others we wish to empower while strengthening our voices and knowledge (Belenky et al., 1986). It is a collaborative effort between the speaker and listener to develop mutual understanding. Dialogue is a mutual understanding of another’s views that require closeness, connection, and relationship to be developed. Talk occurs between two subjects, and the expressions of the result of the dialogue are grounded in the use of personal pronouns to embrace connectedness (Collins, 1989). The historical aspect of the African rooted discourse of “call and response” (Collins, 2000, p. 261) further identifies this tenet as one in which both the researcher and participants are fully engaged and interactive in dialogue. *Call and response discourse* “are composed of simultaneous verbal and nonverbal interactions between the speaker and listener in which all of the speaker’s statements or “calls” are punctuated by expressions or “responses” from the listener (Collins, 1989, p. 763).

Dialogue and active participation build connections, enable deep interactions, and create
a space for learning and sharing. One must not be passive but an active participant in the process of knowledge production (Collins, 2000).

The advocacy on behalf of active participation in dialogue led me to do more than simply listen to the participants to provide statements of affirmation and exclamations that are traditional to patterns of interaction within the Black community. My role as a researcher was to employ the same “call and response” interaction of Black congregations and African diaspora that defines communication. Reminiscent of my attendance in traditional Black church services, I understand that I am not a “detached observer,” and building connectedness to the collective group is done by an extensive dialogue of speaking and listening. I used an unstructured interview guide during my research study that encouraged open dialogue with the participants. The use of an unstructured interview guide and highly engaged participation should not be confused with dialogue if it is a one-sided interaction.

To account for this, I conducted open, flexible interviews, allowed the participants and me to ask questions of one another, seek clarity and verbal responses, and was built around the participant's narratives. The interviews were paired with field notes kept in a personal journal of the virtual interviews. These field notes contained my subjective thoughts, ideas, and feelings that arose to ensure credibility and make me cautious of personal bias. It was essential that I captured the voice of my participants accurately. To do this, during follow-up interviews, I took the transcripts of the interviews and reviewed them with participants to ensure that I had not misinterpreted their stories. I asked questions for clarity and was sure to note any changes. I reviewed my notes and journal to check for any moments of personal bias and subjectivity to ensure that those moments
were acknowledged but not included in the interpretation of participant narratives. I found that this process was complex because I could deeply connect with each participant through shared experiences. I encouraged participants to discuss necessary changes, be curious about my interpretations, and offer modifications throughout the process. During the interviews, I asked questions to gather further understanding and clarification to encourage dialogue and gain accuracy through collective sharing and learning.

**The Ethics of Caring**

The third distinguishing feature of Black feminist epistemology is the ethics of caring. Collins (2000) argued that “personal expression, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process” (p. 263), insisting that the omission of the researcher’s emotions and feelings of connectedness is not necessary. Emotional wholeness encourages the presence of empathy and compassion while acknowledging the role of values within the knowledge production process. In Afrocentric and Black feminist epistemology, values are central to the knowledge validation process (Collins, 2000). The ethics of caring is characterized by three interrelated components: (a) the individual uniqueness that is demonstrated in expressions, (b) appropriateness of emotions, and (c) the capacity for empathy (Collins, 1989). There is value placed on incorporating personality into presenting knowledge claims within Black communities and feminist research. Collins (1989) noted that “ideas cannot be divorced from the individuals who create and share them” (p. 262). As a researcher, I find value in acknowledging that my self-expression, understanding of others’ experiences, and passion exhibited in our dialogue serve as criteria for our ways of knowing among Afrocentric feminist epistemologies.
First, to show genuine care for the data collected, I safeguarded the data of my participants to protect their stories. Ethical protocols were used to store data and personal information safely and securely throughout the research process to ensure the participants' dignity, welfare, and privacy. Data was stored on a password-protected USB device accessible only to me as the researcher. Incorporating ethics of caring involved utilizing dialogue to explain the research project, what I learned, and how I planned to use the data with the participants. Also, I wanted to show respect for the Black women I interviewed, which involved me respecting their opinions, ideas, and culture. There were no attempts by me to change participants’ narratives. Instead, I kept their thoughts and experiences as they chose to share them. Meaning and interpretation of narratives were co-constructed with each participant to ensure that I was (re)presenting data about participants accurately and to give them control of their stories. As I engaged in my research, I took time to read literature that has utilized Black feminist epistemology and literature that has taken traditional approaches to methodology to ensure that I continuously built my knowledge and understanding. Acknowledging my experience as a Black woman was also an acknowledgment that Black women’s experiences are not homogenous and that they are a set of shared experiences that create a collective identity.

**The Ethics of Personal Accountability**

The ethic of personal accountability is the fourth distinguishing feature of Black feminist epistemology, which argues that individuals must remain accountable through their identity and actions. Inquiring about whom to trust is a fundamental question of epistemology; therefore, heavy emphasis is placed on the position of issues, core beliefs, and their role in our knowledge validation process. The credibility and accountability of
the researcher are significant to Black feminist epistemology. Collins (2000) wrote, “assessments of an individual’s knowledge claim simultaneously evaluate an individual’s characteristics, values, and ethics” (p. 265). This argument insists that the researcher is not to be dehumanized, and their standpoint and viewpoints matter when assessing knowledge claims. The researcher must be attuned to how their own experiences have developed their truths so they may begin to understand participants’ experiences. To question one’s morals and ethics is a part of the process of accepting claims in Black feminist epistemology; simply asserting knowledge claims does not mean that these views will be accepted as valid.

With an emphasis on my accountability, I shared with participants how the research will be used to progress the lives and knowledge of Black women within society. I recognized that I have a moral and ethical responsibility to my knowledge claims. I am an advocate for my work and am willing to engage in dialogue to support my claims and confront Eurocentric masculinist epistemologies.

Narrative Inquiry

I utilized narrative inquiry as a methodology to find meaning in the lived experiences of Black women and contribute to the knowledge production process. As a methodology, the disruption and re-narration of the stories and experiences of Black women who contradict false, dominant ideologies can be done through narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry aligns with the principles of Black feminist epistemology as an act of resistance to power, questioning traditional knowledge production processes, and rearticulating the Black woman’s standpoint through storytelling for truth-telling. The voices of the researchers and participants combined into rich, descriptive narratives
provide researchers with opportunities for furthering knowledge about and for Black women.

Narrative inquiry is identified as more than just telling stories and emphasizes creating meaning from stories. The narrative is available to all individuals and present for all ages, in every place and situation, and in every society, creating accessibility for all. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) described narrative inquiry as “the study of experience as a story” (p. 2) and, more specifically how humans experience the world. Narrative inquiry as a methodology is both a phenomenon and a method. This indicates that the narrative “names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the pattern of inquiry of the study” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). As a methodology, data are acquired through stories both lived and told. The role of the narrative researcher is to study and collect the lived experiences of participants and then seek methods to share those experiences with others accurately (Hutchinson, 2015).

**Key Ideas of Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry consists of a set of principles that encourage creative, experimental, and non-linear methods to develop and uncover meaning from stories. Kim (2016) encouraged inquirers to both thinking narratively and aesthetically when engaging in narrative inquiry to continue intellectual freedom, inspiration, and flexibility. To think narratively allows for the movement beyond learning the process of data collection and research standards. Narrative inquiry begins with “engaging with participants through telling stories or coming alongside participants in the living out of stories” (Clandinin, 2006, p. 47). Storytelling can be traced back to its African roots as a method of sharing cultural origins and heroic ancestors and among Biblical stories, legends, and folktales as
a form of qualitative research methodology. Through storytelling, the experiences of others can travel from person to person allowing for the lived experiences of others to move from the individual to a larger population (Kim, 2016). Researchers are to take the journey of storytelling with the participants and become collaborative in that process. It is used to expand our knowledge and understanding of the lives and experiences within the knowledge production process.

Kim (2016) encouraged narrative researchers to imagine a life space in which their imagination is utilized to envision participants’ constantly developing experiences and lives within their spaces, borders, and means of existence. The imagination of the researcher should have no limitations or boundaries that may potentially constrict the development of meaning. The investment and reflection of self are necessary within the inquiry itself, and researchers often find themselves “intimately intertwined with the lives of our participants which would influence data collection, our relationship with the participants, and the research texts” (Kim, 2016, p. 161) that are produced and created because of the inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The relationship with the participant is dynamic and relational and could promote learning and growth without hierarchy, bias, and disingenuity. I was collaborative with the participants and engaged in speaking, listening, and understanding so that I could join them in the process of attending to how stories are meaningful and life changing. During the interviews, I engaged in dialogue and contributed to the discussion with responses, joined in laughter with each participant, and actively listened to shared stories. The process was relational and collaborative to avoid a one-sided dynamic as both the participants and I processed the narratives and lived experiences.
Commonplaces of Narrative Inquiry

Descriptions of human experiences add meaning, thus changing the content and quality of the experience (Clandinin, 2006). These experiences are conceptualized as a continuous, interactive, three-dimensional narrative inquiry space where temporality, place, and sociality are simultaneously investigated and explored. Clandinin et al. (2007) compared these three dimensions as “checkpoints or places to direct one’s attention in conducting a narrative inquiry” (p. 23). The three dimensions are the framework for understanding narrative inquiry.

Temporality. The dimension of temporality acknowledges “that an event or person is in temporal transition” (Kim, 2016, p. 160); therefore, constantly in the process of transition and referenced in the past, present, or future. To acknowledge temporal transition in this process, I noted the beginning, the shifts, and end of the participant’s story from a historical context, inclusive of implications of their ancestors’ way of teaching and knowing about current events.

Sociality. Sociality remains attuned to the personal and social conditions of the participant and the inquirer and notes the connection between feelings and emotions as well environment and existential factors (Clandinin et al., 2007). Sociality also recognizes the relationship between the participant and inquirer as connected, which emphasizes the notion that the researcher cannot be separated from the participants. During analysis and interpretation, I documented the connections and impact of emotions and feelings within a social and cultural context. I tracked and documented participants’ emotions in conjunction with the personal and social conditions of their stories, such as, geographic location, social class, physical and social setting, and attitudes. To the best of
my ability, I ensured that the interview space was emotionally safe and inviting for the participant to discuss their personal stories of vulnerability, pain, and resilience by entering the relationship with non-judgment and bias.

**Place/Spatial**. Narrative researchers draw on site to recognize the “concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of place or sequence of places where the inquiry and events take place” (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 23). The location of events and environment were acknowledged as spaces that hold historical, cultural, and social significance. Also, the place in which these stories were shared was crucial and contributed to collecting narratives that are deep and without limitations. My research took place in a comfortable, safe, and familiar setting for the participants, and each participant chose what felt best for their needs. Attentiveness to all three commonplaces was strongly considered and approached with care and compassion as I, the researcher, collected and composed meaningful narratives.

Narrative inquiry and Black feminist theory both honor the cultural and social uniqueness of stories, and Kim (2016) indicated that “stories are not devoid of theory; the meaning of a story can be elucidated by theory in ways that matter” (p. 37). According to Kim (2016), theory serves as a tool and guide to find meaning and clarity in individuals’ unique stories and experiences. Storytelling is deeply rooted in African and Black culture and has contributed to the passing of wisdom, knowledge, and the rise of oppressed voices (Dillard, 2006, 2016a). Specifically, the narrative and art of storytelling acknowledge the marginalization of Black women’s voices in institutions by providing space for centering their lived experiences (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021). Through this theoretical perspective and methodology, the experiences of intersecting
oppressions on Black women’s mental health and healing practices are storied in relational work.

Narrative inquiry and Black feminist epistemology are interwoven and interconnected, thus allowing for the empowerment of Black women’s voices and experiences while enabling the analysis of the multiple dimensions present in their experiences (Kim, 2016). The significance of the researcher’s relationship with the participant is a critical aspect of the narrative and knowledge production process. Narrative inquiry is relational work characterized by the collaborative nature in which researchers situate themselves in the lives of those they study. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) further emphasized empowering relationships between the participant and inquirer that “involve a feeling of connectedness that are developed in situations of equality, caring, and mutual purpose and intention” (p. 4). Working in step with Black feminist epistemology, there is no separation in connected knowing between the researcher and participant (Collins, 2000). The researcher and participants are connected with dialogue narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Exploring the experiences of mental health and Black women and challenging false ideas were achieved through narrative inquiry in this study. Black women were given the space and time to reflect and share their stories of life experiences with care and respect. The exploration and accurate description of Black women’s experiences provided an opportunity for their realities and truths to be visible within communities, academia, and society.

Plan of Study

Applying Black feminist epistemology to narrative inquiry connects the actions of living, telling, retelling, and reliving the transformative process of creating and shaping
the truths of Black women. Kim (2016) brought heightened focus to the use of reflexivity as a central theme of reflection when engaging in narrative inquiry. Reflexivity is defined as how “the researcher affects and is affected by the research process” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 249) by reflecting and considering their positionality and assumptions. It reflects how those assumptions show up within and throughout the study. Locating ourselves in the research and representing participants accurately can be achieved through uncovering our narrative and exploring our subjective social and political views, research interests, our choice of research design, biases, and assumptions that shape research (Kim, 2016). Reflexivity helped decrease biased, personalized interpretations that misrepresent the valued stories of the participants. Clandinin et al. (2007) stated that narrative inquiry is shaped by the justification of the study, which can be personalized by situating ourselves in the study, practical through informing our desire for change, and social through one’s professional and academic outcomes. As I engaged in my inquiry, I listened, reflected, and dialogued my own experiences and narratives of intersectional oppression within the same space. Within my research journal, I noted the connection between the impact of my personal experiences and ideas on the research process. I wrote about my first impressions, and thoughts, and remained aware of how my own bias may be present in the process. I welcomed their stories and remained curious as the participants shared stories of various events in their lives. I encouraged reflections of these experiences by my participants and opened the space for continued dialogue and moves for interpretation. I offered the same opportunities to my participants to engage in the (re)living, (re)telling, and co-composing that characterizes narrative inquiry, endarkened feminism, and Black feminist epistemology. Participants were given space to
share their stories and lived experiences as they told them. Storytelling created an opportunity for participants to (re)tell experiences of meaning that held significance to their lives and their methods of healing and survival. Co-composing the data ensured that the participants and I created a product of Black women’s acts of (re)narration and (re)presentation that was genuine, authentic, and unaltered.

As narrative inquiry details, the impact of place on the person must be acknowledged within the study. Clandinin et al. (2007) noted that “the specificity of place is crucial” (p. 23), and it may vary as we access the past, present, and future spaces of individual transition. As I entered the life space of the participants, the site of the research was a virtual platform; however, participants remained in the comfort of their personal spaces. The narratives were collected in Shelby County, Tennessee. This is an area in which I reside; there was a sense of connectedness of geographic location. This area is rich in social justice movements and civil rights history that impact Black women’s experiences.

Justification

In narrative inquiry, the researcher is encouraged to explore the justifications for the study throughout the research process. It is essential for me to acknowledge my connection and investment in the field of inquiry as a Black woman. Investigating and creating a narrative of my own inner experiences of racism, mental health, and healing is to create a personal justification that opens the door for relationships, trust, and bonding with my participants. My identity, experiences, home, and profession reflect how I process and interpret my experiences and others within my community. The participants and I entered the journey of (re)living and (re)telling to further understand and
rearticulate the deficit-based standpoints, education, and practices that have been at the foundation of Black women’s mental health experiences. Together, we found meaning within the lives of Black women while disrupting the taken-for-granted notions about their experiences.

**Participants and Research Site**

As I studied the experiences and meaning of mental health and intersecting oppression of Black women, my sample of participants was purposeful and reflected the method so that rich and deep data were provided in relation to this study. A form of purposeful sampling, criterion-based selection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), was used to select participants to ensure that they were knowledgeable and had experiences related to interlocking oppression, mental health, and coping mechanisms. Criterion-based selection allowed me to identify which attributes or characteristics were crucial to the study and select participants based on selected criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) further indicated that the use of criterion-based selection would “directly reflect the purpose of the study and guide in the identification of information-rich cases” (p. 97).

**Recruitment and Selection Criteria**

Potential participants were screened to determine if they met the study’s qualifications. For this study, the sample selection criteria for prospective participants were the following: (a) self-identify as a Black woman, (b) be at least 18 years old, (c) must reside in Memphis/Shelby County, Tennessee, (d) be interested or enjoy storytelling, (e) have knowledge and experience of mental health concerns and coping methods and (f) not have a reported history of extreme mental impairments and mental
illness. To ensure that the participants met the selection criteria, I gave the participants a vulnerability and criteria screening before completing the informed consent process (see Appendix B). The screening consisted of asking demographic questions related to age, self-identification of race, and where they currently reside to ensure participants met criteria a, b, and c. During the screening, I asked participants about their interest in telling stories about personal accounts of their lives and identity as spiritual individuals to ensure further that the study was relevant to their lived experiences. This helped review participants that may have requested to participate in the study but did not meet the initial criteria. Next, to account for safety and minimize the risk of harm, I asked participants detailed questions about their mental health and emotional well-being using the vulnerability and criteria screening. Included in the screening were questions about current diagnoses, use of medications to manage possible diagnoses, their engagement in psychotherapy, and possible distressing situations and thoughts. These questions were used to screen out participants to ensure that participants who disclosed mental health diagnoses had healthy supports that allowed for the least amount of emotional harm to occur during the study. If participants disclosed poor support systems and unhealthy coping mechanisms, they were excluded from the study to minimize the risk of psychological distress.

Potential participants were required to meet all the above criteria and complete and sign the informed consent (see Appendix A). Five potential participants in total volunteered for the study. Four of the five individuals met the study criteria for participation, while one did not meet the criteria due to not living in the Shelby County,
Tennessee area. None of the participants left the study. All four participants completed an initial interview, one 60-minute research interview, and two follow-up interviews.

To recruit participants for this study, flyers were sent to mental health service providers and clinics in Shelby County, Tennessee. I sent flyers to University of Memphis departments to disseminate within their professional networks and graduate school student networks and social media networks. Additionally, potential participants were also recruited through snowballing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Participants and potential participants shared that they heard about the research opportunity from friends, colleagues, and peers. The participants were informed that their participation was strictly voluntary, and their decision would not have a negative impact on their experience with me.

**Sample Size**

To gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of Black women, there was a small sample size of participants. The sample size for this study was four. Narrative inquiry and unstructured interviews can elicit a powerful amount of data; therefore, the information obtained from the participant interviews supports a smaller sample size (Kim, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). There was a focus on the quality of data and connection with participants; a small sample size ensures that attentiveness to those main focuses is possible.

**Risk and Benefit Analysis**

Ethical considerations were made by ensuring that participants were fully aware of the research procedures and potential consequences through informed consent, disclosure of research motivations, and the opportunity for questions and clarity on behalf
of the participants. This was also accounted for in relational ethics, in which the relationships, ethics of caring, and co-creation of meaning were completed in collaboration with the participants. Although there were no physical risks associated with this study, the potential for emotional distress was existent. Participants in this study were asked to revisit times of their lives that may have evoked painful or emotional memories. They were asked to share their experiences of oppression, mental health struggles, and journeys of healing that they have experienced. As a result, the participants may have experienced some emotional distress.

Minimization of Risk

To minimize the potential for emotional distress, as a licensed clinical social worker, I utilized a vulnerability and criteria screening before selecting the participants for the study (see Appendix B). The screening was completed before the informed consent process, as mentioned above, to ensure safety. Additional details of this process are included in the section above-titled Recruitment and Selection Criteria. Participants were disqualified if there was a severe emotional response or a reported history of extreme mental impairments and mental illness. This was done to keep emotionally and mentally vulnerable individuals free of harm and maintain safety. In this study, I aimed to do the least amount of emotional harm to the participants by offering participants to share only what they felt comfortable sharing. Participants were able to opt out of discussing past, and present experiences of their lives that they felt were too distressing. Participants also had the option to pause or take a break if they experienced an emotional response during the interview process. All participants had the option to suspend, delay, or end the interview process at any time. During the process, I watched for signs of tearfulness,
expressions of anger, frustration or irritability, loss of focus, withdrawal, prolonged silence, or change in affect or tone. Upon observing any or all these signs, I assessed the participant’s level of discomfort or emotional distress. If necessary, I offered the participant clinical support in the form of an immediate debriefing and assessment of the level of distress.

**Ensuring Safety**

During the interview process, if I detected any severe emotional response or signs of distress, mental health resources were provided to participants should they experience an increase in difficult emotions during or after the study or if resources were requested. Mental health referrals were within reasonable distance to the participants, and affordable options were provided to address any concerns regarding affordability of services. *Open Path Collective* and *Therapy for Black Girls* were the two resources provided to participants so that there was an option to choose a professional who would best work for them. The anticipated risk for severe emotional distress because of this study was low.

**Consent**

I reviewed informed consent with prospective participants by HIPAA-compliant video conferencing software to ensure understanding and clarify any concerns or issues. I obtained consent from prospective participants by sending the consent form by email with clear instructions on signing and returning it to me, following a complete review of the consent form. Participants were able to return the consent forms via email. The participants were informed that their participation was strictly voluntary and that their decision would not have a negative impact on their experience with me. I utilized a script to emphasize the voluntary nature of the study.
Subject Compensation

There were no incentives or compensation offered to participants in this study. The participants were made aware that the study was strictly voluntary. There was no mention of compensation in the recruitment materials (see Appendix C).

Confidentiality and Anonymity

I assigned the participants pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. As the primary researcher, I was the only one who knew the actual identities of the participants. Once the participants were assigned a pseudonym, their names and the master list were destroyed. Confidentiality was also maintained through the process of data coding. Interviews were coded to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. Audio recordings were utilized and were destroyed upon completion of the entire transcription process. I coded all data, and any identifying information was removed during the coding process if it did not change the interview content. Data were saved on a password-protected storage device that was only accessible to me.

Data Collection

As narrative inquiry and Black feminist epistemologies are both concerned with rearticulating and retelling the experiences of Black women, interview methods based on feminist interviewing are essential to the theoretical framework and methodology in this study. Based on the dismantling of oppressive structures and retheorizing Eurocentric ideologies, feminist interview methods aim to center women’s voices while addressing the unique perspectives of their world that collectively are based on sexism and racism (Harding, 1987; Rodriguez, 2006). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) explained that feminist researchers engage in interviewing that diminishes the power dynamics and “reduces the
hierarchy between the researcher and the researched” (p. 128). As researchers and researchers, women are valid contributors to a knowledge production process that values active participation and verbal interaction. To resist dominant ideologies, individuals must resist the inaccurate worldviews placed on marginalized populations and hear the stories of Black women. For this study, I sought to uncover and highlight the lived experiences of Black women to examine their experiences of systemic racism, mental health, and the methods of healing. In-depth, feminist-informed interviews served as a tool to challenge the dominant ideology and paradigms while producing knowledge representative of Black women’s realities, experiences, and concerns about racialized experiences.

**Life Story Interviews**

To gather data, Kim’s (2016) approach to narrative inquiry was used to conduct a biographical narrative inquiry in the form of a life story. Kim (2016) indicated that this form of inquiry “explores lived experiences and perspectives that people have of their daily lives, including their past, present, and future” (p. 125) and how meaning is created from those narratives. This interview encouraged the participants to share behaviors and emotions that are unable to be observed and insight into “how people interact with the world around them” (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 108). Exploring lived experiences through a life story allows for the relationship and interactions between individuals and society that are intertwined with one another to be explored and shared between the researcher and participant. Life stories can empower the voices of Black women through its focus on the reality of the individual and a telling of their experiences by themselves and with their voices without interference from dominant and oppressive structures.
Interviewing is a tool for storytelling that can provide understanding and meaning to the lived experiences of Black women whom Black feminist thought seeks to define and empower (Rodriguez, 2006). Life story interviews can elaborate and inspire the (re)membering of events or episodes of one’s life (Kim, 2016). Consequently, life stories can provide a sense of agency, create life meaning and inspirational change, and most significantly, a sense of healing through dialogue. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) noted that within the practice of feminist interviewing techniques, special attention is given to relationship development with the participant, social change, and social justice within marginalized and oppressed groups. Life stories are an extension of endarkened feminist interviewing and narrative inquiry.

Unstructured interview methods are prevalent in feminist research methods. Unstructured interviews are exploratory and conversation-like (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The primary source of data collection for this study was unstructured, in-depth interviews as a method to gather life stories of the participant. Unstructured interviews shift increased control to the participant and invites them to discuss sensitive lived experiences freely and openly while still allowing me to focus on my agenda. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) referred to unstructured interviews as interactive and guided by an interview guide while remaining spontaneous and flexible. It is important to note that while the life story interview is based on an unstructured interview format, I chose the unstructured format to guide toward specific life experiences and events of mental health and healing. As a critical component of Black feminist epistemology, the unstructured format allows for the back-and-forth dialogue. I was not a passive listener but an active participant through clarification and contributing personal narratives when appropriate.
Participant Interviews

For the current study, I met with participants at least three times during the data collection process and no more than two contact sessions for member-checking, which was completed upon the participant’s completion of their story and narrative process. The interviews took place virtually on Zoom, due to COVID-19, in a space identified as comfortable and safe by participants. Participants were given the option to choose between in-person or virtual meetings, and I honored their preferences. The first session was dedicated to building relationships, reviewing informed consent, completing the vulnerability screening tool, and discussing the purpose of the research project. At this time, I encouraged questions and dialogue from the participant. One goal of this initial session was to build a relationship with the participant so that when the second interview took place, the participant would have an increased level of comfort as a caring community was established. I completed a 1-hour unstructured, in-depth interview with each participant during the second session. The third and fourth sessions were also conducted virtually to clarify or expand on data and ideas from the first two sessions, ask follow-up questions, and present data findings for member checking.

Interview Transcription

To ensure that the participants’ voices were not silenced and reflected accurately, the interviews were audio-recorded. Dialogue within the relationship is a foundational part of narrative inquiry and Black feminist epistemology. The inclusion of the unaltered language, nonverbal cues, utterances, and environmental aspects increases the integrity of the transcription. Transcriptions were checked multiple times against the audio recordings for accuracy. I transcribed all the interviews by hand and discussed the
transcriptions with participants to ensure trustworthiness and co-creation of meaning during the follow-up sessions. Once each transcription was completed, the participants were engaged in the co-creation and collaboration of the narrative, including addressing clarification gaps, linguistic and speech inaccuracies, and silences (Nasheeda et al., 2019). During transcription, memos and a personal research journal were kept to capture my initial thoughts and ideas that emerged from listening to narratives. This journaling practice was influential in capturing and reflecting on my reactions and thoughts and acknowledging personal bias throughout the interviews. The co-creation of the narrative is symbolic of the relationship and the relational meaning-making process within narrative inquiry, feminist research methods, and Black feminist epistemology.

**Insider/Outsider Status**

To enter the life space of the participant is to gain entrance into the locations of the lived experiences of women. The relationship between the researcher and participant is viewed as fragile without building connection and appreciation for the life space of participants. My insider-status allowed me entry into the shared experiences of Black women; however, I am an outsider in my position as a researcher. I acknowledged this and asserted that my position would shift continuously if I remained attentive to place, authority imbalances, and perceived hierarchy (see Best, 2003; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). To account for my fluid position as both an insider and outsider, I engaged in reflexive practices that addressed my positionality and research standpoint from an intersectional perspective. This process involved me reviewing my decisions throughout the study for bias and judgment that arose from my lived experiences. Journaling created the space for me to navigate my experiences as a Black woman who also had engaged in
a personal journey of spiritual healing, mental health, and oppression. It also enabled me to ask if my work experiences as a clinical social worker played a role in my beliefs and data analysis. This process was significant in ensuring that my subjectivity was acknowledged during data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

**Analysis and Interpretation**

Data analysis in narrative inquiry is defined as “a family of methods for interpreting texts” (Kim, 2016, p. 323) and indicates that there is not a sole method of analysis or interpretation that researchers must utilize. The experiences of Black women and Black feminist epistemology benefit from an analytic approach that considers the way of thinking and knowing specifically for Black women. This study required an interpretive process that involved analyzing the unfragmented stories of healing the pain of Black women, Black womanhood and identity, and their perceptions of the world. Traditional qualitative analysis methods would not have been effective in making meaning of the stories. Instead, I needed to identify an approach that enabled me to emphasize the storyteller holistically, the researcher and researched relationship, and the uninterrupted stories and voices of Black women authentically that acknowledged cultural, social, and spiritual understanding. To accomplish this, I analyzed and interpreted the data using Evans-Winters (2019) *daughtering* approach to process the meanings of stories, locations, and emotions of participants in my study.

**Daughtering as a Method of Analysis**

*Daughtering* was used to identify the lived experiences of Black women regarding mental health, healing mechanisms, and the meaning of their existence from personal narratives. Evans-Winters (2019) described daughtering as a “worldview that
shapes your mind and is a way of being and navigating the world” (p. 139) that is unique to Black women. It is the historical and spiritual connection to our ancestors that drives our memories of socio-emotional journeys and representation of Black womanhood. Daughtering involves imagining the unlimited possibilities and interpretations of Black women’s experiences (Evans-Winters, 2019). Importantly, there is no instruction manual on how to engage with data. I planned to process the data through a ritual of reading, reflecting, contemplating, and writing. The goal was to approach each narrative uniquely and embrace the spiritual guidance of ancestors (Evans-Winters, 2019). During the process, I thought about each piece of the data and its relationship to cultural, social, and emotional contexts. I journaled to process my thoughts, ideas, and contemplations of my interpretations to ensure respectful methods of representation (Evans-Winters, 2019). This was a creative, malleable, and unpredictable process where I had the opportunity to consider the multiplicity of interpretation and dynamism of Black womanhood through negotiation and co-creation of meaning and representation. The experiences and resilience of Black women were centered and made the focal point of knowledge production and the analytic process. During this process, I wanted to highlight both the vulnerability and resiliency of the participants as a means of empowerment and truthfulness. To ensure appropriate record-keeping of this knowledge production process, I kept a journal of my daughtering process of interpretation to outline how this process took place.

The first step of my analysis and data interpretation was a reflective coding process that began after the initial interview with the participants and during the transcription process. Interpreting using the method of daughtering required me to
“...bear witness to the vulnerability and agency of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine” (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 140). I transcribed all the interviews by hand to remain close with the data. I began with three fully interviewed participants: (a) Alexann, (b) Soraya, and (c) Isa. Following an advising meeting with my committee chair, we determined that the addition of a fourth participant would be ideal for gathering additional narratives and stories related to the research questions. Anya was interviewed after the interviews, transcriptions, and initial coding of the three participants were completed. Due to personally transcribing interviews, it generally took about seven days to complete one full interview transcription, and follow-up interviews were not conducted until I fully transcribed each prior interview.

I coded each interview individually and line by line. I journaled my reflections after each interview, transcription, and data review. Often, I noticed my connections to each participant and their stories, mainly because they felt so similar to my experiences. I reflected on what it meant for me to be a Black woman with mental health struggles and my own manner of healing. My journal exposed my vulnerabilities, and I utilized those vulnerabilities to think deeply about how my past experiences could impact this data. It is essential to note the significant amount of reflection that I engaged in as I reflected on the data. Journaling allowed me to process the data to include my personal, visceral thoughts and ideas, emerging themes, and questions I held about the research. Initial codes took form immediately after the process of reflection took place during initial coding. Those codes were identified as mothering, family relationships, the resiliency of Black women, spirituality as a form of comfort and personification, navigating multiple roles, resisting oppressive structures, and redefining Black women’s identity. After the second interview
was transcribed for each participant, I coded the interview, line by line, and then recoded the initial interview with the follow-up interview. The follow-up interview questions were based on my initial codes, data that may have been unclear to me, or stories that needed depth and understanding. As I completed the follow-up interviews, I separated and categorized the codes in relation to the research questions. This process involved journaling my transitions of thought and the patterns that consistently arose, and conflicts in the data between narratives. Themes were then constructed that represented the convergence of ideas and patterns from the data. I thought deeply about the accuracy and relevancy of the themes to the participants’ stories and reflected on the role of my shared experiences in this process and recognized that the initial themes could only provide a general sense of the data. I then reviewed and reflected on the narratives, themes, and journal to populate the themes with subthemes that provided depth, detail, and richness to the themes. These subthemes were then reviewed for accuracy and relevancy to the themes, and the participant’s lived experiences. This process involved the constant merging of participants’ experiences, literature, journaling, reflections, and (re)living of my own experiences as a Black woman.

To begin, I started with a process of reflecting on my struggles with oppression and mental health to ensure that my personal life and mental health struggles did not impede the process of analysis. I felt that this was important because the way that daughtering “…permits our daughters to consider that one piece of data could have multiple interpretations and meanings, and we give meanings to the data based on our positionality in the world” (Evans-Winters, 2019, p 140). Next, I brought a significant focus on resting and clearing of the mind before engaging with the data. If I noted that
my anxiety was high or that I was struggling with my thoughts, I did not engage in the analysis and interpretation of data.

In thinking about data representation, I contemplated the best method to share the unfractured stories and knowledge of the participants, who also served as an act of resistance to universal truth claims purported by the dominant ideology. I prepared the research text for one audience, women and girls who identify within the diversity of Blackness. The representation of data in this study centers the experiences, resilience, and representations of Black women to serve as a resource and teaching tool that benefits the community. I imagined this as a product that shares the participants’ emotions, locations, stories, and experiences. I chose to represent the data in the form of creative expression through an arts-based format that is comprised of the narratives and “I-statements” that reflect the participants’ ownership of their stories and represent my love, care, commitment, and respect for Black women as human beings (see Evans-Winters, 2019). Evans-Winters (2019) explained that “daughtering obliges that we embrace our multiplicity and seek to express our data representations as multivocal and multi-textual” (p. 139). I chose to present the data in various ways as a representation of Black women’s ability to push back against traditional ideals of truth and knowledge while highlighting that our way of knowing and knowledge production is full of endless possibilities (see Evans-Winters, 2021). Evans-Winters (2021) noted that “…Black women’s interconnectivity opens ways of knowing and understanding the (im)possibilities of qualitative methodologies that have remained underexplored and or dismissed as non-scholarly” (p. 483). The presentation of data and findings is an act of resistance, empowerment, and love for Black women.
Ethical Considerations

Narrative inquiry and Black feminist epistemology require critical examination of the power and oppression within the participants' narratives. Clandinin (2006) explained that ethics involves imagining it as being about “negotiation, respect, mutuality, and openness to multiple voices” (p. 52). The ethical process of feminist research and narrative inquiry is more than checking lists and completing research forms (Clandinin, 2006). I ensured participants were aware of my research intentions and purpose through dialogue and by answering any questions they had about the study throughout the interview process. The unaltered stories and process of making meaning for the participants were shared as a form of data representation, and these representations were checked for conciseness and accuracy with participants. Using Black feminist epistemology allowed me to write and engage in a research process that disrupts the dominant ideology and contributes to the knowledge production process while protecting Black women and their stories.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness of the interpretation of the participants’ stories can also be an ethical dilemma. Respecting the stories and narratives of the researched involves representing the data accurately while employing respect for the lives of others. To ensure this, I sought out the consultation and collaboration of the participants in the representation of data for credibility. This was accomplished through member checking in the follow-up sessions held with participants. Time was dedicated to reflecting on the interpretation of narratives and transforming them for accuracy. I also met with my committee chair and content member to discuss my findings, address questions, and
process my ideas and concerns. This ensured that I was thoughtful in the analysis process while I remained true to my participant’s stories. Personal journaling and an audit trail with procedural memos were utilized to track my process for ensuring credibility and research dependability (Kim, 2016). I kept a detailed account of this process to ensure trustworthiness.

**Reflexivity**

Kim (2016) examined the significance of reflexivity in narrative inquiry as researchers are engaged in co-creating and meaning making of participants’ stories. Reflexivity requires that the researcher analyze the role of power, accountability, and honesty. The practice of reflexivity is essential to the ethical relationship between the researcher and Black women as an oppressed group. One must reflect on their intentions and motives for engaging in Black feminist research and assess the moral goals of their research. Pure intentions for rearticulating the stories of oppressed groups and contributing to the knowledge that represents these groups are necessary to uphold the ethical standards within Black feminist epistemology. Moral respect of the narratives of participants must be maintained. As a researcher, I understood that I must place myself in the position of the researched for understanding and decreased judgment regarding the lives and experiences of others. I engaged in reflexive and ethical practice by journaling throughout the process. I wrote in a research journal and had consultations with my committee advisor to account for my reflections and subjectivity in my interviews, analysis, and interpretation of participants’ narratives. My advisor mentored me through the process and allowed me to talk out my questions and hesitations. This would not have been possible without a trusting and genuine relationship. Together, we worked through
my ideas and processing of data so that I was honest and transparent about my positionality throughout the process.

In conducting narrative inquiry from Black feminist methodology, the relationship between the researcher and the researched must be comprised of values, respect, dignity, and connectedness (Tracy, 2010). The relationship between the researcher and participant is highly valued and asserts that relational ethics must account for the ethical dilemma that may hinder this process. Within this relationship, I acknowledged the voices of the participants and the dual roles that are held as a narrator of the story and a contributor of the research process. It was important to reflect on this aspect because, as a Black woman, I stand close to the participants’ lives, and I too search for an accurate representation of my story and shared experiences. I informed participants of their dual roles and obtained recommendations on how they envision themselves as contributors and collaborators with the study. Each participant shared similarities in requesting that their stories be used for “good” and for other Black women. To address the relational capacity of the study, participants were informed of the length of the study, and I prepared them for the termination of the relationship that accounts for the development of connectedness between the researcher and participant over time. I was aware of the need to navigate boundary settings that come with connectedness and relationship, so I was clear on the time expected for the study and provided mental health resources when necessary. A false sense of relational longevity can be expected where participants may be unintentionality led to believe the relationship will be lasting, which may increase participant openness towards relationship building or pleasing. I shared openly about this process and answered any questions that arose from participants. Questions about
boundaries, dual roles, and length of the study were addressed within the informed consent and throughout the data collection process. Journaling helped to maintain boundaries and relationships and continuously aided in maintaining an ethical stance.

Positionality Statement

As a Black woman, I acknowledge that I hold both the insider and outsider status of this study. Because of this critical aspect, it is necessary for me to reflect on the intersection of my identities as a Black feminist researcher, Black woman, and mental health self-advocate. The definitions of my Blackness, womanhood and mental health struggles are continuous and changing based on my daily experiences. I cannot find a time when these definitions were not profoundly personal and present in my actions and thoughts. From the social media representations of Black lives to the lack of acknowledgment of Black women’s emotional truths, and to my awareness of “I’m not doing okay,” I hold values, emotions, and thoughts relating to my identity in high regard. I know me; however, I can only assert that I know myself. I engaged in my research about Black women to find the same depth and understanding that I have within myself and share that re-articulation of meaning and life. I know that I am misunderstood and portrayed as a woman that should be strong enough to deal with every obstacle and one that experiences pain and hurt differently. As a self-advocate for mental health, I acknowledge the disregard for mental health and healing and stereotypes that exist for Black women. I come with my views regarding the impact of one’s perspective and views on navigating adversity and oppression.

I maintain that Black women experience emotional pain and struggles differently and heal differently than society has portrayed. A goal to further contribute to an
unfinished truth underlined my intentions. I wanted to know how the very women who hold the same copious amounts of melanin and shared experiences have healed from wounds that do not seem to close. I further came to this research to deconstruct the status quo on the lived experiences of Black women for not only others but for myself as well. My identity forced me to reflect on and address my motives for researching mental health and Black women and how my motives contribute to my research.

My interpretation of the world can lead me to question the intentions of dominant culture and anti-Blackness, while prematurely asserting that I know “how the story goes” for Black women. In processing this, I acknowledge that it is not enough to hold and acknowledge these views on centering Black women and decolonization, but action is required. I challenge the influence of dominant ideology, White supremacy, and ableism on the knowledge production process. In centering Black women’s experiences and decolonizing my schemas, I understood that I entered the space with the power of an outsider as a researcher. Throughout the process, I questioned my position as an outsider and how my ideas may have been influenced by inaccurate narratives and misrepresentations of Blackness and Black womanhood.

My access was not guaranteed to the intimate lives of participants. As a researcher informed by Black feminist thought, I acknowledged the power that I held and attempted to engage with myself through inner dialogue on how I utilized that power. As a clinical social worker, I work in the mental health field, providing therapeutic intervention, diagnosis, and assessments for individuals. This outsider status as a “therapist” may also cause mistrust and stigma by simply engaging in dialogue and relationship with me. I am not working in that role; however, there was a potential for beliefs that I attempted to “get
into the minds” of Black women to influence their thinking. I only offered emotional support when the participant experienced distress. I immersed myself in the knowledge that encompasses the historical implications of mental health discussions and brought that awareness to the research process. I hoped to increase my trustworthiness by being transparent and open about my subjectivity and multiple roles while opening myself up to critiques and difficult conversations that may arise from participants and audiences.

**Summary**

This study aimed to investigate the lived experiences of intersecting oppression on the mental health and healing of Black women. Using narrative inquiry as the methodology and unstructured interviews based on feminist interviewing, biographical narrative inquiry, and research journaling as the methods of data collection, I engaged deeply and spiritually with participants’ narratives and co-create meanings of the spiritual, social, and cultural experiences of Black women’s mental health and healing.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This study aimed to describe the lived experiences of Black women’s mental health and methods of spiritual healing from intersecting oppressions. The participants, Alexann, Soraya, Isa, and Anya, all identify as Black women over 18 and expressed an understanding of the relationship between mental health, coping skills, and spirituality. The participants exhibited a deep relationship to spirituality as a coping skill for mental health struggles such as anxiety, grief, and loss, navigating personal growth, and overwhelming feelings. Their understanding of this was based on personal, lived experiences of maneuvering through everyday struggles and living as a Black woman. I used narrative inquiry (see Kim, 2016) as the methodology and daughtering as a method of analysis for the participants’ shared stories (see Evans-Winters, 2019). These findings are meant to center the resiliency of Black women for survival and coping and place Black women as the subject of discourse.

This chapter presents the themes and subthemes that were co-created by the participants and me. The themes were constructed from a relational, caring analysis and the lived experiences and perceptions that were co-constructed from the shared stories and reflections of the participants: Alexann, Soraya, Isa, and Anya. Recognizing that the lived experiences of Black women are not homogenous yet similar was true for the participants in this study, all of whom are living within different phases of their unique and beautiful lives.

The themes constructed were: (1) navigating multiple roles: a source of strength and stress, (2) Black women (re)defining mental health, and (3) Finding comfort and healing through spiritual practices (see Table 1). To present the data, I chose to invoke
daughtering for the analysis and interpretation and the creative, multi-textual, and arts-
based presentation of Black women’s lived experiences and perceptions. Evans-Winters 
(2019) explained that as “an ethic of love, daughtering conjures creative expression” and 
that “daughter’s data representations might be shared through dance, a poem, a piece of 
prose or a song…” (p. 139). The data are represented with daughtering and improvisation 
as the driving forces of creativity and cultural representations that Black women 
“…comprehend and make comprehensible our existence, “being”, and realities with the 
use of qualitative research methods” (Evans-Winters, 2021, p. 482). Therefore, a 
combination of data expression of participant narratives using shared narratives, 
unaltered excerpts, and the deconstruction of false universal beliefs through poetry will 
represent the findings.
Table 1

Emergent Themes and Subthemes of Participants’ Stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Navigating the multiple roles: a source of strength and stress</td>
<td>The problem-solver, protector, and Black superwoman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black women (re)defining mental health</td>
<td>Feeling (mis)represented and (mis)understood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Re)defining mental health through meaning making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Re)narrating controlling images as a survival mechanism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding comfort and meaning through spiritual practices</td>
<td>The use of relational spirituality to cope with intersectional oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finding peace through diverse healing and spiritual practices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Description of the Participants

To ensure confidentiality, participants were assigned pseudonyms that were used throughout the study. Participant 1, Alexann Byrd is a 58-year-old Black woman, who enjoys bike riding with her husband. She responded to the recruitment flyer that was posted on a social media site for Black women currently enrolled in a doctoral program. She has been married for 34 years and has three adult children and seven grandchildren. Alexann works in higher education as a staff and faculty member and is also a doctoral student. Her God-centered marriage are valuable to her, and she described this journey as a meaningful experience for her and her husband. Alexann is deeply connected to both religion and spirituality. She holds leadership roles in the church but leans on her
spirituality for healing and finding purpose from experiences. Also, Alexann expressed a strong relationship with God and places value on her ability to hear messages and the Word from God. Often these messages have led her to act and intervene in various situations regarding her personal life, family, and church members. This relationship is comforting to her and is a large part of her being. Her enthusiasm for the study was high as she engaged in the interviews with happiness, comfort, and feelings of acknowledgment. Alexann spoke frequently about her excitement to share her experiences and expressed that the opportunity to share her experiences as a Black woman was powerful as she was grateful for the space to be heard.

Participant 2, Soraya Reece is 48 years old and described herself as deeply invested in the historical significance of her ancestors and as a “somewhat militant person” who grew up in a town laden with racism in West Memphis, Arkansas. Soraya volunteered for the study after seeing the recruitment flyer in a graduate student networking group. Soraya also described herself as a social justice advocate and holds a deep interest in advancing the rights of the Black community. She explained that being a social justice advocate would be her job if she were not working in higher education. For her, she began that journey as a teenager creating change against educational oppression and racism during her early years of education. She has one teenage daughter, has worked in higher education for the last 23 years, and is a doctoral student. Soraya talked openly and freely about her experiences of oppression during the interviews, and I attributed this to her past experiences of social justice advocacy. She did not shy away from expressing herself, and I viewed her as the most outspoken participant. Soraya also noted that her
loc’d hair is also an act of advocacy and resistance and explains that this physical attribute is meaningful in her expression of Blackness.

Participant 3, Isa Alston is a 33-year-old who enjoys talking to her friends and family. She is a stay-at-home mother, engaged, with two children ages 12 and 1. Isa works from her home as a licensed nail technician; however, she is also a licensed social worker but not working in the field. I took notice of the time of day that Isa replied to emails and text messages about interviews, which was generally late in the evening. I soon learned from Isa that the night hours are the hours to herself. This was important to note because Isa is the problem solver of her family and takes care of many in need. She described herself as spiritual and indicated that her grandmother played a large role in her spirituality and understanding of mental health. Isa discussed in-depth her transition from childhood to adulthood as she mentioned several behavioral issues in school. She was open to discussing her troubles in the educational system and was threatened with being sent to a boarding school if she did not change her behavior. Despite her success in entrepreneurship and social work, she feels that the K-12 education system failed and misunderstood her needs as a Black child. She described herself as “silly and goofy” yet presented as unsure of herself based on her interview responses. I encouraged her often throughout the interviews to trust her words as she often ended statements with “I don’t know” despite answering the questions.

Participant 4, Anya Roberson is 29 years old and enjoys shopping, yoga, and reading. Anya was the youngest participant and was encouraged by Isa to take part in the study. Anya is the only participant who practices meditation frequently in the form of mirror and water meditations. She has one 5-year-old daughter and currently works in the
mental health field. She is outgoing, outspoken, and expressed dreams of returning to college so that she can become a therapist. Anya is in a significant stage of her life because she is grieving the recent and unexpected loss of her mother. She described herself as close to her mother before her passing; however, she was not hesitant throughout the interview process to mention her. She attributed this to the grieving process and that she continues to navigate her way through it. I considered Anya to be fragile because of this loss and felt extremely protective of her emotions during the interview process. I was careful and considerate noting that while she may have smiled and laughed with me, this may have also been a way of coping. Lastly, Anya was the only participant who asked for mental health counseling resources. I did not ask her reasoning why but instead provided her with what she needed at the moment.

**Theme: Navigating Multiple Roles: A Source of Strength and Stress**

This theme sheds light on the shared stories of the participants’ lived experiences of navigating the responsibilities and management of multiple roles. It also highlights the inability to say no to the requests and needs of others even when it increased their life stressors. First, there is a focus on the multiple and intersecting roles the participants identify as, such as the mother, daughter, sister, friend, student, and church member. These roles serve as a source of strength because it gives the participants a sense of pride and belonging related to caring for and nurturing others. Protecting their families, ensuring safety, solving problems, and caring for others are acts that exhibited their strength. Yet, at the same time, these roles served as a source of stress because they led to role overload and impacted their mental health by increasing stress and anxiety. There was also a perceived obligation that, as Black women, one cannot say no to the
expectations of leading and caring within the family system. This controlling image of “the Black Mother” was reflected in interviews and an insistence that if the participants were to say no and voice their concerns, then they would be portrayed as inadequate and selfish mothers within society. Secondly, the perceived obligation highlights a notion that if the participants, as Black women, did not step into these roles within their families, nobody would. Juggling these multiple roles and responsibilities in life was common for all four participants, yet it contributed to both their strength and feelings of anxiety and being overwhelmed.

The participants’ day-to-day lives were diverse as they shared their many roles, how they engaged with their families and friends, and how they maintained their careers and personal goals. The participants strived to meet household and family responsibilities while also attempting to manage their personal goals and endeavors. For example, Alexann discussed how she managed her role as a doctoral student and progressed in her career while being an active church member, mother, and wife. Isa worked from home as a nail technician and small business owner while working as a stay-at-home mother as she ensured the needs of her family were taken care of. Anya shared that she is a mother and sister who works in the mental health field and has goals of returning to college.

I identified three salient identities among the data as I reflected on the participant’s narratives and role responsibilities: protector, problem-solver, and the Black superwoman. Maintaining the multiple roles was both the source of strength and stress for the participants as the participants shared their pride and commitment to various responsibilities as well the lack of personal self-care. While identifying the roles that they hold, the participants discussed that while multiple roles in life are important and
valuable to them, there was still the heavy burden of feeling as though if they did not nurture and care for others then no other individual would step up to the duty. This is shared throughout the narratives of the participants who addressed their identities and roles responsibilities of being a protector, problem-solver, and Black superwoman within their familial systems.

The findings indicate the duties and obligations that participants feel lead them to embrace others’ needs over their own personal health and tasks. Mental health struggles can impact any individual at the least expected moment in life. This was true also for the participants particularly while they engage in their day-to-day activities and responsibilities of life. The toll taken on the Black woman’s emotional well-being and ability to cope effectively over time continues as Black women resist oppression, heal past trauma, and protect their families. The participants defined mental health as how they handle the pressures of life and their overall will to handle adversity. Understanding that life does not halt during an emotional struggle highlights the notion that while the participants were navigating their multiple roles and responsibilities, mental health difficulties were still present. In particular, the women shared multiple roles in life as they provided background into who they are, their interests, families, and careers. Often, the participants prioritized the emotional, social, and physical well-being of loved ones at the expense of their own self-care and goals.

Further highlighted was the difficulty to separate the perceived obligation to care for others from their identity to place their mental health and self-care at the forefront of their lives. The participants go to great lengths to protect their families from adversity and emotional harm and guide their families. To present this data on the Black woman’s
prioritization of protecting and nurturing others, I have highlighted stories and shared excerpts of the participants’ stories that highlight their instinct to serve as the problem-solver, the protector, and the Black Superwoman for family members and communities.

**Subtheme: The Problem-Solver, Protector, and Black Superwoman**

The problem-solver, protector, and Black superwoman is a subtheme that provides a deeper understanding of the multiple roles of the participants. The three roles are interconnected and presented as one subtheme to signify their coexistence within the participants’ lives. First, the role of the problem-solver represents how the participants step in to solve the issues of their loved ones. This involves identifying the issue of another individual, solving the problems, and addressing any remaining factors that could impact their loved one adversely. Next, the role of the protector identifies the part of the participants that ensure the physical and emotional safety of loved ones. When the physical and emotional safety of their loved ones are at risk, the participants’ personal needs and tasks are set aside to offer support, protection, and guidance, even if it inconveniences the participants. Lastly, the role of Black superwomen is representative of the problem-solver, the protector, and all additional roles that the participants hold. Being a Black superwoman involves taking on perceived obligations, emotions, roles, and tasks without saying “no.” The Black superwoman offers meaning and purpose to the participants’ lives, but it also leads to overload, burnout, and limited self-care. The participants’ stories represent how the women managed the roles of being the problem-solver, protector, and Black superwomen as they served as sources of strength and stress.

**The Problem-Solver.** The participants discussed how they engaged in problem-solving as an act of intuition without asking questions and when there was a need for
guidance during times of adversity. Alexann shared a story involving her son in which she served as a problem-solver to her son’s personal relationship struggles with an ex-girlfriend. She acted as the problem-solver to her son’s issues by uncovering the truth about his past partner’s allegations that he is the father of her child. She identified the issue, engaged in a great deal of research, and resolved the problem for her son. Alexann described herself as “Inspector Gadget” when searching for a woman who claimed that her son was the father of her child. She took it into her own hands at all times of day and night to search and probe someone who had brought mistrust to the family. Alexann took on the responsibility of an issue personal to her adult son and directly not her own.

Alexann drew on a story in which an ex-girlfriend of her son shared news of a pregnancy in which her son was the father. She recalled that she expressed joy at finding out this news and encouraged her son to fulfill his role as a father. However, Alexann, one who cherishes her close relationship with God and the depths of her spirituality, stated,

That particular night, I went to sleep, and the Lord awakened me at 2:00 AM in the morning. And he said clear as day… oh, I heard this random word… I heard this voice; it said the girl is not pregnant. I’m like, what?? Not pregnant? Wait Lord… wait, wait, wait Lord! I'm like, I believe you Lord but you gotta give me some evidence for other people to believe. So, the wheels started turning.

Alexann continued to share how she stayed awake late at night, into the early morning searching for answers and signs from God that the word she received was true. Social media searches, Google searches, messaging others through social media that she
did not know, all to gain answers for her son and peace of mind and refers to herself as “being Inspector Gadget.” She stated,

So, I inbox her boyfriend, and so I'm still playing Inspector Gadget. I'm like… how she doing? I hadn't heard from her….um, she in Nashville? Says no, she’s…she's laying right next to me. Okay…so I found her mom and I couldn't inbox her, but I end up getting some of her friends. Her inbox is closed off to me, but I was able to get a couple of friends… so can you tell so and so to inbox me? Got ahold of her mom and talked to her…her mom was like, I just dropped her…by now it's like 6:00 o'clock in the morning.

The lengths that Alexann went to protect her son exhibited her willingness to refuse herself sleep, rest, and school and work duties, so that she may protect the emotionality and life of her son. She did not describe this act as a burden to her but rather her “need” to remove mistrusting individuals from her son’s life while following the words of God. Alexann framed her narrative of protecting her son by receiving the word of God around her confidence and gratefulness that God would speak to her. Alexann did not question her actions but rejoiced in God’s decision to provide her the insight and stated,

Such great confidence (emphasis). To think that…. of being…Creator of heaven and earth, almighty God, who knows all… is talking to me? I could actually hear his voice? Just like wow! (emphasis) It blows my mind. So, it just builds. It again gives me that confidence in who I am and whose I am that I belong to him, that there is a creator that cares about me,
that loves me and that is concerned about the very number hairs on my
head, you know?

Notable also is Alexann’s unwillingness to accept the status quo for her son and act as a
buffer between her child and the world. For Alexann, her role as the problem-solver was
intuitive and unquestionable, and her needs at the time were nonexistent to her.

Anya reminisced about the loss of her mother in 2020 due to complications from
COVID-19 and stepping in to handle the medical discussions and plans for her mother’s
funeral while handling workplace stress. Anya acknowledged the difficulty of stepping in
as a problem-solver for her family but mentioned that she recognized that she would be
the sibling required to fix and lead during this time of hardship. Anya is the youngest of
six siblings and the only female sibling. Despite having older siblings, who may typically
take charge in experiences and familial distress, Anya, the youngest, took on the
responsibility of taking care of her mother’s medical needs. She stated,

It definitely took a big toll… which is…everything was like, me trying to
do everything for the longest since… especially with me being the only
girl and women …we're built to take on these things better than men are.
So, my brothers and even though they're calling the hospital and checking
in and stuff and taking it like all, I kind of went blank. I don’t remember
what they said… I don't know what they’re talking about. I just sit through
it with the doctors on the phone and now I have to reexplain it to you
when I don’t even wanna talk about. I wanna shut my own brain down
from it and have everything go blank, but I can't.
To understand how Anya took on this responsibility and where she learned to take charge and be the problem-solver of the family, Anya was asked about how she came to understand this obligation. Anya expressed that even as a young girl, she witnessed the women in her family taking the lead and handling matters of the home that did not include finances, which the men mostly handled. The obligation to nurture, lead, and guide was based on learned childhood experiences that defined the roles between men and women in her family. Anya recalled,

I feel like I did grow up around a lot of strong women. My mother was really like, headstrong and a lot of my aunts are very headstrong. It was eleven of them… of course I have uncles too, but the men in my family mostly work and just kind of handle the finance part and the women are more so like, okay, this is what needs to happen. This is how it's gonna go.

This is how some things are gonna work out.

For Anya, this is how her experiences shaped her understanding of how Black women both solve problems while nurturing and supporting others. When she witnessed the men in her family having difficulty handling discussions with doctors and medical decisions, it was natural and learned behavior to step in, regardless of what may have been going on in different elements of her life. Anya further discussed the emotional toll that this act of care had on her and acknowledged that her multiples roles were overwhelming while indicating that she had not taken the time “just breathe.” She noted the emotional pain and frustration that she experienced as she could not care for her mother directly, visit her, or help her heal due to the restrictions of COVID-19. Anya shared,
It's really like, wow, and it was just dealing with that and still having to…at the time when it first happened, I’m still going to work and then just being a mom and having my little girl ask me questions about where Granny is and everything. It was just a lot that was going on and it was a build-up, and it was just like frustrating because… always being able to do something and now it's like, I can't go in there.

Anya immediately stepped in as the problem-solver, as Alexann did, to her family and without question. As though her action was not a choice for her but an obligation to her family that she had witnessed so many of her aunts, grandmother, and mother do as well. These acts of problem-solving are enmeshed in the identity as Black women, daughters, and mothers for Alexann and Anya and serve as a critical reminder that Black women will place their well-being to the side to ensure that their family is well taken care of.

**The Protector.** Next, the identification as the protector represents Black women’s feelings of obligation and actions that are taken to ensure the safety and protection of their loved ones from potential harm. Isa shared a story of a role as the main support system for her family, mainly her father diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes and kidney failure. Isa is familiar with being the lead woman in her family, offering support to family, friends, and clients at different times and for different needs. Her background as a social worker and her deep connection and lessons from her grandmother appeared to be the source of strength, caring, and knowledge.
Isa recalled when her father contacted her while she was doing a client’s nails. Her father was having a minor medical emergency related to diabetes complications and an encounter with a rural police department about 45 minutes away from her home. Isa explained that her father sat at the end of a driveway in his car when the homeowners noticed him. Her father was in an unknown community, had become ill, and parked his car. Law enforcement later approached him, and his medical condition also contributed to his agitation and confusion, so he called his daughter, Isa, for help. Learning from her father that he was ill and interacting with law enforcement created a high level of fear and anxiety but also engaged a part of her that felt obliged “to protect our Black men.” She shared that she stopped her client’s nails, packed up her children, and headed to her father while simultaneously Facetiming her father, attempting to calm him down. She expressed the chaos of her moment and stated,

Meanwhile, my dad is on FaceTime with me, telling me I need to get the people on this case because the police are messing with him. Um, there was nothing going on that those police did wrong. They did their job. I understood why they did what they had to do but I'm having to teach my dad.

Isa also highlighted her selflessness for her father, but she details while she feels an obligation to protect and sustain Black men, there is emotional strain that comes along with it. Supporting others takes on their additional struggles and requires a devotion of time that simply adds to the current tasks. Isa is tugged back and forth between her
father’s safety and health and the obligation to her children. She described these times as “tough” and expressed,

I have a 1-year-old in the backseat who's been in this car…um, I have a son that's in school and I haven't…we haven't had dinner. You know, I didn't change my baby before I left. I just got her and…you know? That was a lot that day, and those are those days happen more often these days.

Isa shared that her experience of protecting her father, which also involved problem-solving while parenting her children, was exhausting, and demanding. She discussed during the interview that these days are becoming increasingly frequent.

Isa stated,

It's like the airplane example when they tell you to put your mask on first or your whatever on first before you help someone else…. Like we forget to take care of ourselves first, and we kind of just have burnout within our own…our own little family unit.

Parenting and protecting does not stop; for Isa, it is frequent and has led to personal burnout.

**The Black Superwoman.** Lastly, the Black “Superwoman” is the role responsibility and identity that Black women hold as they attempt to manage additional responsibilities, including the role of the protector and problem-solver. The identity of the Black superwoman will take on these tasks and roles out of expectation of others and perceived obligation to their families and communities. Soraya discussed her experiences with being considered as the sibling who can endure all responsibility within her family and often takes the role of the outspoken social justice advocate. Soraya shared her
experiences of not only taking the role of the problem-solver and protector but also the superwoman who can take on the responsibilities of others because of her perceived strength. It is not that Soraya is not a “strong Black woman,” but it is important to note that Soraya is a strong, Black woman who also can be burdened with responsibility and additional pressures of life stressors. She shared the unexpected idea that she can become tearful at sad commercials because she has been seen as the primary woman in her family. She shared,

You know, I'll cry at like little random crazy commercials or movies like that, but I'm usually not one that, you know, just bawls or, you know, just I don't know, and it's probably because I'm the oldest of my siblings. And, um, somebody was telling me about this book about the order of siblings, um, but I'm typically the one who feels responsible for taking care of my siblings even though we are all adults and...and I've sort of reached that age where you know, now you have to become the parent to your parents. So, I'm always the one who doesn't fall apart in a crisis because there are a lot of dramatic people in my family. So, it's like somebody has to be the sane, rational one.

When asked about the additional pressures that being an advocate and the obligation she feels, she explained that there are times when she even questions her ability due to feelings of intimidation and imposter syndrome. Soraya described a struggle within herself to feel that she is fully capable of advocacy, leadership, and the well-being of others due to a lack of knowledge and
experience. While others express to Soraya that she is capable of leadership, she admitted,

Sometimes I wonder what…what is it that people seeing me that…that make them feel like this is where I'm best suited, and maybe you know people see things in me that I don't see, but sometimes there is that added pressure that. If people are saying things, then I have a responsibility to respond to that. So, sometimes there is this level of frustration and anxiety.

The added pressure and the assumptions that she can take tasks on add to an overall feeling of obligation to present herself with superhuman capabilities while not truly feeling confident in her ability. The frustration and anxiety serve as an added pressure to this assumption of the Black “superwoman.” There is a benefit to be being strong and resilient, but Black women must not sacrifice their mental health and self-esteem for the perception of being superhuman. Soraya acknowledged the position that Black women are placed in as the individuals to speak up and advocate for justice in various settings. When asked if she feels that she was meant to serve in this role to society, she stated,

There are times when I don't know what it is I’m meant to do and there are times when I feel like I do have a responsibility as a Black woman in white spaces to say and do things, but I know how this system works, right? So, we know that there are things that we need to do, but we also know how society sees Black women and there is the frustration that you have to play the game. Uh, because there are so many labels that are placed on us already, so sometimes it is. I feel like there is a responsibility
that somebody is going to have to do it. Uh, and if you find yourself in the unique position that you can do it then you should do it but there are days when I feel like yes and then there are days when I feel like…(pause) no. Like Soraya, Isa also discussed the expectation from her family that she is continuously available to serve as a support system. Isa addressed the pressure that she experiences that is time-consuming and demanding of her. Isa stated,

As I mentioned, I have a one-year-old. I have a 12-year-old athlete. I have a fiancé. Um, I have a single mom who works to make ends meet. I have a sister that was shot in the back with an assault rifle. She has a husband who's on dialysis, has stage four kidney failure. He's also a… a diabetic, um…um has heart failure. I mean just being a support system for all those people and being relied upon for different reasons at different times, like you can't call it. And just trying to be available when they pick up the phone and call and say, hey and especially with my dad.

Despite Isa having her own family obligations and a business, she is always ready to be there when her family requires her help. She noted traumatic and difficult experiences that she has encountered with her family. Isa did not deny that there is an emotional impact on her, but she openly discussed that she often does not make time to cope and engage in self-care until the late hours of the day. She also noted that she unwinds with food and snacks such as Doritos, indicating that the stress of the day has increased her likelihood to engage in unhealthy eating and little rest. She said,
And so, it's because when it's like in the wee hours of the night, everybody is still. And I'm like, okay, there's my peace. So, I try to utilize that time to be with myself to enjoy me doing whatever boring thing I want to do. Whether it's watch YouTube videos or eat my junk food or whatever it is so. Yeah, but I was enjoying some Doritos or something!

Anya also shares her feelings of being considered the backbone of her family and the cyclical nature of engaging in this role. Anya shared,

You’re the backbone to a lot of people around you, family, and everything all that comes back to just having to be resilient and just going through the day. Taking on your life and everyone else’s around you and just keeping a smile, staying positive and just unwinding at end of the day and then waking up to do it all over again.

Compared to the amount of time and energy that Isa places into others, very little time is dedicated to herself. While others can request her support, Isa finds her peace in the wee hours of the night, when all is silent, but that is not much time at all. Anya brings awareness to the cycle of continuing to put others’ needs before her own. She suggests that the roles of the backbone of the family and Black superwoman are continuous and repetitive in nature. There is not an opportunity for one to say “no,” instead the response is always “yes.”

**Theme: Black Women (Re)defining Mental Health**

Black women (re)defining their mental health is a process that the participants engaged in to (re)gain control of the inaccurate representations of their experiences of
mental health. Engaging in this process of (re)defining their experiences against controlling images of Black women and the dominant narrative about Black women’s mental health offers a sense of empowerment and control for these Black women. The process of (re)definition took place for the participants as they engaged in (re)naming their experiences, roles, and expressions to regain control of the dominant narrative. First, the participants narrated experiences of their mental health and emotional expressions that have been stereotyped and (mis)represented within society. These (mis)representations were reflective of what family, friends, coworkers, and other society members have named as representative of Black women’s mental health. Naming these inaccuracies acknowledges the falsehoods that exist but also acknowledges that these inaccuracies must be (re)defined by Black women. This created an opportunity for the participants to share their stories and emotions of life that depict their realities. Next, the participants (re)defined their mental health experiences and realities through the sharing of stories. These unaltered stories provided insight into the emotional struggles and growth that changes the perspective on mental health, ultimately leading to a (re)definition of Black women’s well-being. As the participants shared their personal understandings and definitions of mental health and well-being, they also shared their thoughts regarding society’s pathologizing narrative of their emotional responses that Black women were angry, difficult to understand, and “mentally unbalanced.” The participants shared their experiences of the (mis)representations of their mental health experiences and responses while noting both the inaccuracies and impact of (mis)representations. During the interviews, each participant discussed their introductions to their own mental health struggles and provided insight into unique experiences of
personal struggle. From these experiences, the participants were vocal in sharing that stereotype regarding Black women’s mental health has historically been inaccurate with assumptions about how Black women should emotionally respond in situations. For example, Alexann shared her experience of a conflict in the workplace where she felt her White female boss expected Alexann to accept her degradation and dismissive behaviors with complacency, as though she was immune to emotional responses. Alexann was placed into a position in which she was forced to either accept the emotional abuse from her coworker or advocate for herself and risk being labeled as the “crazy, Black woman” or incapable of doing her job. She discussed that her choice was to leave that position but only after she secured a new position, therefore she was subjected to this behavior and experienced feelings of overwhelm, emotional exhaustion, and self-doubt. She makes the decision to persevere through adversity and oppressive structures so that she can remain employed and not jeopardize the future of her career. As the participants constructed their narratives and understanding of mental health, they openly shared that society has portrayed (mis)representations of their emotional responses and expressiveness. They engaged in a process of calling out the inaccuracies and (re)narrating their responses and experiences of mental health with their individualized, yet similar experiences.

Three subthemes were co-constructed from the shared narratives that represent the process of empowerment that involves (re)naming, (re)defining, and (re)narrating the participants’ lives experiences and realities. These subthemes provided further depth into the process of (re)narration and (re)defining their mental health experiences. First, the participants named the (mis)representations and (mis)understanding of mental health that they have encountered throughout their lived experiences. Next, participants shared how
they resist inaccurate representations and controlling images of emotional responses and characteristics of mental health by sharing stories and experiences of their realities. In this subtheme, the sacrifices that Black women make to take care of others over themselves were highlighted. The participants shared that there is a lack of self-care and time dedicated to refueling their energy and resting that has led to their needs being placed secondary to the needs of others. Holding multiple roles, loss, stereotypes of Black women, and lack of acknowledgment for their work were all shared as contributing factors to increased stress and mental health struggles. Lastly, I present how the participants take control of the narrative by (re)narrating the realities of their struggles as a method of survival against oppressive structures that have silenced and (mis)represented their lives.

**Subtheme: Feeling (Mis)represented and (Mis)understood**

The acts of (re)naming the (mis)representations of mental health are explored in this first sub-theme. Participants share individual experiences of their mental health, their emotional responses, and communication styles that have been misrepresented in their lives. The participants have come to understand the misrepresentation of Black women’s mental health and the temporary silence that these (mis)representations have led to them feeling misunderstood and unheard. Addressing the fact that Black women are (re)defining the controlling images of the mammy, matriarch, and the welfare mother rejects a narrative that society has used to oppress Black women (Collins, 2019). These controlling images have (mis)represented Black women’s diverse and purposeful life roles as inferior, poor, and Jezebels (Collins, 2019). Controlling images of Black women’s mental health portray mental health experiences as nonexistent due to a
perceived level of insurmountable strength and being robotic, angry, and stoic (Ashley, 2014; Evans et al., 2017). Black women must constantly prove that their experiences of depression, anxiety, and stress are valid, real, and appropriate emotional responses to their experiences (Evans et al., 2017). This task of resisting can be emotionally and mentally exhausting contributing to burnout. While the participants share different experiences, there were similarities in the controlling images that impacted them: This process of naming their experiences offers insight into how Black women narrate these inaccuracies.

The following section is presented as unaltered excerpts of the participants to represent the shared and unique experiences of (re)defining the struggles and importance of mental health to the participants. The participants were asked about their experiences of mental health and their beliefs about how Black women’s mental health has been represented both accurately and inaccurately within society. The participants discussed the most difficult and most influential aspects of being a Black woman in society as well as the stereotypes that they have encountered in their lives. This representation of data presents the similarities and differences that the participants have experienced through unaltered excerpts of the participant’s realities. The following statements are a representation of the stereotypes regarding behavior, emotions, and coping ability that the participants have experienced as they have navigated throughout their lives.

Isa stated,

Um, I feel like people expect us to just go with the flow and be okay with what we’re given, or what we were told and not question anything …not
necessarily authority, but just not question anything, not have a, um, rebuttal, you know?

The expectation that Black women are capable of managing hardship and adversity without experiencing emotional and mental strain is a (mis)representation of their experiences and results in the oppression of Black women. Isa shared her thoughts of Black women taking on multiple role responsibilities without question or decline. This represents the assumption that Isa must remain complacent in accepting feelings of overwhelm and (mis)representations of her mental health while exhibiting insurmountable strength. She suggested there is a level of complicity that suggests that while they may have internal struggles or increased stressors when identified as the backbone of their families, they continue to take on the additional stressors without complaint. Underlying the acceptance of the role as the backbone of the family, Isa also suggested that there is an expectation that Black women will at times be compliant with this cycle. The expectation of complacency can silence Isa from advocating for her needs creating a pattern of abuse and being taken advantage of that increases feelings of hopelessness and stress.

Any shared,

I know a lot of Black women…we get a lot of grief about being so headstrong and always is taking the charge. But when that's kind of like the role you basically been thrown into… it’s not even something that I would think every Black woman would say that “Oh yeah, I just always
wanted to be in charge and take the lead.” It just kind of like a role thing.

You have to do it and who's gonna do it? Besides, you?

Anya discussed the roles that Black women are placed into even when they have no desire to take on the additional roles. She explained that there is an obligation to take on these undesired roles because she does not feel as though others will step into it. Soraya stated,

For Black women, um, I think a lot of times we suffer in silence. Um, and I think that because there is such a stigma on mental health, specifically in the Black community …that a lot of us do suffer in silence. We don't want to seek help for fear of being, um, carrying the stigma or um…. being labeled as crazy or mentally unbalanced. Uhm, and I do feel like sometimes. Uhm, because we are…we always labeled as the angry Black woman or being aggressive, um, that when we do sort of let it rip or let it go that were then labeled as crazy, um, because we dealt with so much and held it in for so long for fear of being labeled um, that we do suffer a lot in silence.

Alexann stated, “Being looked down upon. Being considered lesser then…being considered not capable of doing the job. Be it openly showing or expressing that or subconsciously within internally looking at you as if you…you know… I'm better than you.”

The participants acknowledged the obligation to take on roles that they are thrown into for fear that there are no others to fill the role. Soraya and Alexann shared their experiences and thoughts of the (mis)representations of Black
women’s emotional responses, roles, and mental health. There is an avoidance of communicating the stress and emotional impact leading to silence due to a concern of being labeled as “aggressive,” “lesser than,” “mentally unbalanced,” as well as the stigma of mental health.

Alexann stated,

Black women have been at the bottom of the totem pole for the longest, and it’s kind of this thing of finding your voice as a Black woman to be able to speak on certain things without people feeling like you’re entitled, or you're the angry Black woman in the room, or you're expecting special privileges.

Alexann shared that she feels that Black women have historically been treated as inferior in society. She also explained that Black women are tasked with balancing advocacy and empowerment for themselves while they simultaneously attempt to avoid being stereotyped as angry or entitled. There are consequences to advocating and standing up for Black women. The participants discussed an assumed privilege or secondary gain that is placed on Black women when they challenge oppressive structures. This balancing act that Alexann acknowledged exhibits a process of (re)defining the false narratives of mental health.

Any shared,

Also, the fact that we are headstrong, especially if you're around Black men. You kind of get this this grief about not being soft enough, not being vulnerable enough, or always…um, feeling like you want things to go your way or having to just always take the initiative and it's like, well, you
know nobody else has said anything or done anything or if something comes up, it's like all eyes are on you like, “So, what you think? Or what you wanna do?” And then once you start getting into that role, it’s like, “oh wow, you kind of doing a lot!”

Isa stated,

You know, we're just being seen as angry Black women when we, um, offer a… an opposing view to something and I think that's been the hardest part for me. Um and an even harder part of that is, um, when other Black women make you feel that way as well, not even our Caucasian counterparts. Um, but I think that's the hardest part for me.

Anya and Isa discussed that their experiences of (mis)representations have also occurred in their interactions with Black men and other Black women. Anya first shared the incongruency between Black men desiring for her to be “soft” and vulnerable and Black women taking the initiative and leading in various situations. She also shared her thoughts on Black men expressing their disdain for Black women who choose to take the lead when others have not stepped up. She explained that a portrayal that Black women are “doing too much” by stepping into roles and responsibilities that require leadership but noted that this is done due to a need existing for them to engage in these roles. Isa added that she had experienced the “angry Black woman” controlling image placed on her by White and Black women. However, she described the hardest part for her is coming to terms with the fact that Black women have placed these stereotypes upon each other.
Anya stated, “You have so much coming at you and coming at you. And, of course, you're resilient. Of course, you're already built to take all of this, but it's only so much anyone can handle realistically.”

Alexann shared,

Again, being looked down upon as inferior, um, incapable of getting the job done or uh… and the list goes on… poor… weak… ghetto. I can think of a number of words that come to mind in how they look at us from a stereotypical viewpoint.

Anya expressed that Black women are built to take on multiple pressures, stress, and oppression; however, she still acknowledged the unrealistic nature of taking this all on without impacting their mental health. There was an emphasis placed on poor, weak, and ghetto, noting her disgust and the seriousness of these oppressive terms.

Anya stated,

Black women, we do hold a lot of things in, and we do let things kind of build-up and boiled up or you kind of depict the situation because you've already been through a situation similar. So, you kind of already on edge, especially like you really haven't had anyone to kind of talk to about the situation or something so when it arises again it’s like well I'm just gonna shut this down before it gets started, which I feel like gives off that picture of the angry Black woman but it's also because no one has taken the time out to actually talk and understand what is really going on.

Alexann stated, “Or it’s just another Black girl that can’t take the pressure.”

Soraya shared,
I mean like the last couple weeks have been really frustrating at work and probably I, I think, for the most part it's mediocre white women who get to be mediocre. Nothing is ever done about it and...but we're expected to perform at 100%. And nothing that we do is ever appreciated.

Isa responded,

You know, um, I don't know...and sometimes it's weird...like I feel... like in some situations, as Black women, we have (emphasis) to do that in certain situations just so people will just, like, chill out. Like for example, like, depending on the setting you like, we have to do a lot. If we go somewhere, we decide which car we're gonna drive just so we can kind of finesse the experience, or, you know, tweak the experience.

The data obtained from the participants are representative of the stereotypes and misrepresentations of Black women’s experiences of mental health within society. The participants shared similar views of both the fear to challenge these misrepresentations as well as the emotional impact of controlling images.

**Subtheme: (Re)defining Mental Health through Meaning Making**

Next, the process of empowerment is (re)defining mental health finding meaning in their lived experiences. The participants share accurate description and realities of their mental health that involves defining their experiences on their terms. This act takes back control and power from dominant narratives by telling their stories. Soraya and Isa both discussed the history of family mental health struggles as meaningful experiences that shifted their beliefs. Soraya’s introduction to mental health occurred after witnessing her mother’s own struggles of past trauma and the ramifications of unhealed trauma. It was
not until she experienced her own feelings of anxiety that she was able to relate the two situations together. Seeking therapy through a divorce was her first encounter with the therapeutic option, but it would not be her last time.

Soraya is attuned to her emotional needs and emotional health. Soraya is determined to not allow her lived experiences to negatively affect how she parents her child. She described her goals of parenting to break generational curses of familial childhood trauma but recognizing trends and patterns that needed to be shifted to ensure the emotional safety of her children. In a conversation with her daughter, Soraya described discussing “generational curses and how to parent, we tried to either parent not how we were or how we were raised or a different way of raising our children, or a combination of both” as a form of protection for her child. This is Soraya’s attempt to not only (re)define the role that mental health and generational trauma had on her family but also exhibits how Soraya has actively sought to control the impact of generational curses on her and her daughter. She accomplishes this through her personal parenting style that is informed by lived experiences of both hurt and healing from childhood to adulthood.

Isa is also attuned to her mental health and shared her perspective of mental health as a former student and granddaughter. She describes her fears of how quickly an individual’s mental health can decompensate. Isa is fearful of mental health and described it as “scary” because “being in the social work field, you see how quickly mental health can change and how mental health is influenced by things and how sometimes something’s going on and it's not exposed until that big thing happens.” Isa recalled a saying that she heard her grandmother and other elders say often and shared, “so I always thank God for
my current health, and I pray for, um, continuous, uh, mental health. You always hear...well, I've always heard old folks say you know, I just pray that I can stay in my right mind.” Her closeness to her grandmother and watching her grandmother’s mental health decline over time due to Alzheimer’s encouraged Isa to take time to support the emotional well-being of her children. She shared, “I try my best to maintain my own... and be the person and in certain situations that help others I guess, um, better process, what they're going through mentally, and that's not just professionally but with my children” exhibiting the role that Isa has in protecting the emotionality of others. I share the same fears as Isa, being a mental health professional, in that my career experience within the field provides a sense of urgency to protect the emotions and well-being of those close to me. Isa solidified her fear of mental health and stated, “again, mental health is scary. You just never know what a person is experiencing and what lengths they would...they will go to get other people to see that they're experiencing something.” Isa is adamant about ensuring that healthy emotional well-being and mental health are accounted for in her family despite the fear that she holds about the possible decline of one’s mental health.

Isa also provided insight into the importance of taking control of her stories by choosing to not focus on negative or unimportant perceptions about her. Isa shared,

Um, and I try not to put too much weight on things ...that don't deserve it. I tried to put too much weight on how other people feel about me.... view me. Things that don't matter, um and some things that I feel like others
may put weight on that I feel like aren't, um, worth it? Um, it becomes
comical to me like, OK… whatever. I feel like when you give energy, to
things that are not valuable to you, you allowed them to control you in a
sense. So, why allow how someone feels about me to tear me down? Or
negatively feels about me to tear me down?

Isa described the power that can be gained when she does not allow for negativity or
issues that are beyond her control. There was an emphasis placed on the value and
empowerment that places the control back into her hands. She also shed light on her
ability to not focus on the negativity and adversity that other individuals may
communicate. Isa has come to an understanding with herself that she will not place value
on the statements of others that hold no purpose in her life. Her (re)definition takes place
in the form of her resisting the stigma of mental health struggles by coping with her own
struggles and emphasizing the importance of her doing so as well.

Soraya, Isa, and Anya shared stories of grief that most directly impacted their
mental health over the last few years. The loss of family close family members was a
trigger for creating psychological distress for Soraya, Isa, and Anya. First, when asked
about her introduction to mental health, Soraya noted that her experience was based on
the loss of her father. She noted that she originally sought out support before while
coping with divorce; however, at that time, she shared that she was drawn away from the
process due to poor interpersonal connection with her therapist. This would not be the
last time that Soraya sought out psychotherapy as a coping mechanism because she was
soon tasked with navigating the passing of her biological father while in her doctoral
program. It was at this time; Soraya made the decision to be vulnerable in the therapeutic
process because her grief was now manifesting as anxiety and impacting her schoolwork. She reflected on that time and shared,

Then after my biological father passed away and I started to notice my behavior was changing… like things around my house were, um, piling up and like junk just started to accumulate and, um, I thought I need to seek out therapy.

Compounded by the grief of her grandmother’s passing as well, Soraya further described that “out of the blue,” she suffered an anxiety attack during one of her classes and was ready to admit to herself that she had not truly coped with these losses. The losses also impacted her functioning in a way that called on her to seek help. Alexann’s introduction to mental health is unique, in that it began through a doctoral class. Alexann’s experience with her professors placed importance on self-care and mediation as a significant aspect of the educational experience. She shared, that she “always was a woman of prayer, but I began to focus more on it in the meditation realm and the deep breathing realm” as she learned about it in her doctoral class. The experience was new for Alexann who noted that her background in the use of prayer, prepared her for the practice of meditation. Once this was grasped, Alexann now “was able to sit and relax and…and just begin to… think more about myself mentally when it comes to the pressures to take a break and just breathe.” Notably, the professor’s use of meditation as a coping mechanism was particularly significant to Alexann as a skill that could be used within the classroom. For her, it presented the dynamic that professors can teach the importance of self-care practices while modeling self-care as well.
Subtheme: (Re)narrating Controlling Images as A Survival Mechanism

Lastly, the process of (re)narrating the controlling images is the power and control the participants have sought to gain. (Re)narration is a survival mechanism and health coping skill against oppression. It is an act of resistance and self-love that acknowledges the participants' pain and stress, (mis)representations, strengths, and resiliency. Prevailing throughout the interviews was the participants’ constant resistance to controlling images of the “angry Black woman” and “superhero strength.” All participants highlighted the emotional impact of workplace oppression and the emotional strain of constantly advocating for themselves in a system that does not acknowledge their efforts as Black women yet require them to be “perfect” or take on additional tasks without questioning. Mentioned also within the interviews was the feeling of being misunderstood with little attempts by others to learn about their lives and the complexity of being a Black woman. The resistance to dominant and false narratives was shared throughout the study. The participants exhibited vulnerability in discussing both their lesser and higher strengths. In discussing what was loved most about being a Black woman, the participants shared that their diversity, creativity, and resiliency were loved. The participants’ reliance on interconnectivity and spirituality as a way of healing and coping was also presented as a way to rediscover and define a unique way of dealing with controlling images. To highlight the (re) narration of the lives, experiences, and identity as the participants as Black women, this category is represented as a collaboration of Alexann, Soraya, Isa, and Anya’s interpretation of self-love, struggles, and resiliency as dialogue to present this data. A poem was chosen to represent the data because it is a powerful example of how this representation of (re) narrative and (re) definition can be viewed. The lines chosen
for the poem are the words of each participant brought together as an act of love. The following section is presented as a poem to acknowledge the beauty in (re) defining and (re) narrating Black women’s identity.

The ability to express ourselves
   In everything we do
   In the way we lead
   Our makeup and our will
We are either in the background supporting
   Or at the forefront leading
   It is the resilience of Black women

We’re creative with how we talk
We’re expressive with how we talk
   You still use your hands
You still gonna move your you head
   Your lips may still smack
I’m an expressive Black woman

   Creative and diverse
   Unafraid of embracing adversity
   Unafraid of resisting
   There is nothing out of reach
   Embraced in prayer
   Emboldened by identity
   Black woman,
   You are
   Who you say you are

Theme: Finding Comfort and Meaning through Spiritual Practices

Once the participants gained control of their narrative and controlling images through a process of (re)naming, (re)defining, and (re)narrating their experiences, participants described their use of spiritual healing and coping practices. Spiritual healing and coping practices provide an understanding into how the journey of healing takes
place individually and relationally. In this theme, the participants share their healing and coping mechanisms that encourage healthy role management, the prioritization of self-care, and healthy emotional well-being with the use of spirituality. Spirituality is identified as a significant dimension in each of the participants’ lives. Each participant shared the role of spirituality in their lives and the different aspects of spirituality that have supported and guided their method of coping and healing. During the interview, participants were asked about their experiences of healing, coping, and spiritual healing within their lives. The participants shared stories and narratives of personal distress or family crisis in which they noted that they engaged the spiritual practice of prayer as one of the main coping mechanisms for pain and distress. Alexann, Anya, Soraya, and Isa engaged in a similar process of seeking out spiritual guidance if they acknowledged an issue followed by seeking understanding. It was during that time of seeking understanding that the participants found relief and comfort. Participants also shared that a way of finding meaning and purpose of lived experiences was to embrace their relationships with friend circles and social support systems. This reliance on interconnectivity exhibits how Black women rely on a support system of other Black women to share stories, experiences, and emotions to engage in a coping practice. While spiritual healing can be defined as an individualized experience, the participants highlighted the relational aspect of coping that places significance on Black women’s interconnectivity and relationships with one another as influential.

Subtheme: The Use of Relational Spirituality as a Coping Method

Healing and coping through relational spirituality and interconnectivity were a subtheme that focuses on the relational aspect of healing and coping that the participants
expressed as a component of their coping processes. While coping individually is beneficial, there was also emphasis placed on participants’ utilization of social supports and close relationships to disclose their struggles and willingness to be vulnerable around others, specifically other Black women with shared experiences. The participants discussed their methods of healing and coping and the symbolism of relationships with others and interconnectedness as spiritual experiences. Black women engage in the healing process by finding comfort in connectedness and relationships because of a shift from oneness to “we-ness” (Jones et al., 2022). As I analyzed the data, memos, and personal journal, I noticed a trend of the participants engaging in a process of healing from adversity through the relationships and connections with others. These connections were developed as different areas of support for the participants and included, friends, family, work and academic peers, and professors. Experiences of spirituality were different between each participant; however, all four participants expressed that spirituality was a significant component of their lives. I inquired about the participants’ meaning of healing and current coping skills that aid them in their search for understanding and acknowledgement of Black women. To present this data, unaltered excerpts were used to express the participants’ various beliefs and interactions with spirituality as a coping and healing mechanism. The following statements are a representation of the participants' use of community, interconnectivity, and spirituality as a method of healing from adversity and oppression. Anya stated,

Um…they'll ask for help when they need it, but it was a lot of times, it’s just kind of, having the emotional support from family to be able to vent
about the situation, but if family offers the support, they'll take it, but more so, not directly asking all the time. It was more so like, okay, I just need to vent and get it out, okay? And with the family… and my family being so close… it was like an automatic like, nature to this, “Okay well I can help you with this” or “This is what I can do to help you out.”

Alexann shared,

I love seeing um…um… being from… the doctoral program, the advisors, the instructors that I’ve come into contact with have made me aware of these things…um open my eyes, as the kids say, stay woke. They have really awakened me to what's going on in society and how it's putting us in this box. So, it's been very encouraging to see…even in the class when the…those of white nationality, not of color…get it. When they are blown away and understand and are in tears and uh are trying to explain or just in the midst of class and discussing it. So, from the teachers…you know, to the advisors, to students, to classmates, and then uh…even in the bigger picture, when we get a Black female vice president, when we get a black president, whose wife is doing so much for colored girls. Um, it’s those things from personally to the Martin Luther Kings of today you know. Uh, that are really making a name for us and opening doors that we could not have open on our own.

Anyaphrasedphasis on receiving emotional support from her family when it is needed. She mentioned that her family is aware of others’ needs for support and offer to provide that support yet, noted that Black women “will ask for help when they need it”
alluding to a self-awareness that encourages Black women to be aware of the emotional well-being. Anya suggested that social support and familial relationships can still offer healing and comfort and that the response she received in the past has been automatic. While this awareness is present, she still noted that it is likely that members of the family will help before Black women suggest that help is needed. Alexann values the support and understanding that she receives within her doctoral program. The acknowledgment and presence of Black women’s experiences has been influential within the classroom. For Alexann, the inclusion of experiences that are related to her identity is relieving and supports her place as a Black woman in education in which the experiences and attempts at genuine understanding are nonexistent. A sense of connectedness is developed through empathic understanding from others in her classroom.

Spirituality was introduced as a coping mechanism that is a part of an individualized journey. The spiritual journey is diverse, personal, and undefined but it fits the unique needs of unique experiences.

Soraya stated,

You know… how do you… what you do and what does that look like…to be healed…to be whole. Um, through whatever it is that has kept you from moving forward. Um, if it's something from your childhood or something from your adulthood or in the workplace, or just life in general relationships, children, you know, whatever that looks like…for you to be able to heal from that. Self-care, therapy, um, exercise you know, whatever it is will release you from your pain.
Anya shared,

I usually go into my shell. I stay to myself a lot. I don't really talk about it as much with people. I would say I’m one of those people that’s like a boiler. I let it build up and build up before I just let it all out and express it. I’m like oh wow, I didn't know that …like, yeah, I've been dealing with this for quite some time, but just don't really know how to express it sometimes and I’ll resort to my shell or listen to music to kind of get my feelings out and play what I feel. In college, I started learning about meditation and everything like that. So, just pray and meditate. Sort of say some mantras to get myself back into it and just having… if you can…have that one friend that you can just vent to and let it all out when you’re ready.

Soraya and Anya both discussed becoming healed by finding understanding from their life journeys while exhibiting a vulnerability to practice self-care and engage in meaning-making such as meditation, mantras, and psychotherapy.

Isa stated,

But um, I mean after like over the years, it's like a…it's always like this transition, this growth going on so, I think initially like just… communicating or conversing with peers and kind of just like venting. Just like, “I just need to scream girl, let me… let me have your ear” while I curse, and you know whatever. Um, crying and like getting it all out like, okay I'm gonna boo- hoo. And then, like, after that I have like this is a… I
don't know like, okay, well that's uh, conquer the world, you know, um, prayer.

Isa expressed that friendship and communication with peers is a valuable tool to engage in the healing process. She is willing to express her emotions to a circle of close friends who free of judgement and bias. A sense of community allows this engagement in healing.

Soraya stated,

….so, I'm in therapy and so I, you know, through advice by, you know, her… I sort of tell myself, you know, these things… um you deserve to be in this space. Um, and I sort of recognized when I'm going through periods where I’m questioning myself or my abilities or, um, I have sort of stopped trying to conform to what I think people think I should be, um, or what they think they know. So, showing up to work as my authentic self, um, is one way where I don't try to stifle, um, who I am… so I think those are some ways that I have… sort of coped with that… um… having those internal conversations with myself saying, you know, you deserve to be in this space… um… what you have to contribute is important. Um, and stop… I guess doubting myself.

Soraya discussed that engaging in therapy was advised to her and this was a place where she found direction in her identity as an individual. Soraya discussed that mental health therapy and spirituality are equally important to the healing and learning process. She stated, “I do recognize that mental health and mental health therapy is as equally as important as we view spirituality.” There are two personal
interventions that are fused together for her and are not viewed as separate. She also discussed the importance of spirituality that exists within the Black community and among Black women. She ended with the assurance that when one must seek mental health therapy in addition to spirituality, there are no wrongs. Her openness to address concerns with mental health treatment was beneficial for personal growth and healing. Overall, the process of healing is unique and multi-modal.

**Subtheme: Finding Peace through Diverse Healing and Spiritual Practices**

The experiences of spirituality are diverse and unique to each participant. The shift toward spirituality describes the individualized experiences of spirituality and the journey towards connecting more personally. This second subtheme explores the actual shift that participants made toward spirituality including what took place to move them toward spirituality and their individualized experiences of engaging in spirituality after the shift occurred. This subtheme arose from the participants’ focus on their personal journeys of toward spirituality and the uniqueness of how they have utilized it as a way of healing.

The participants were asked about their use of coping and healing through spirituality. Discussed most often, was how the participants came to understand spirituality as a significant aspect of their lives. Each participant discussed a different meaning and different journey towards this shift. Anya, Isa, and Soraya shared similar experiences in which they became connected to spirituality as they searched for an understanding of what they had been taught by family members on what was truth in religion.
Alexann identifies herself as a Christian woman and elder within the church who has a much deeper connection to the church than the other participants including having a role as an elder. Anya discussed her views on the differences between religion and spirituality and described the individual journey of spirituality as non-conforming alignment with an individual’s personal view. She noted that religion is seen as a group experience based on rules while spirituality is experienced in the way that one feels is most beneficial to them. Identified as the subtheme of the individualized and personal experience of spirituality to humans. There were no exact similarities between the participants in their method of spirituality; however, each participant shared that prayer and talking to God was a large part of coping, healing, and comfort. To present this data, I have chosen to present the unaltered excerpts that (re)present the significance of the turn towards spirituality and the impact on the participants’ lives as an individualized experience.

Isa shared,

Um, and I didn't mention prayer initially because again, that's something that I've really had to grow into, like, being solid in my faith and I'm not a super spiritual person, but I am to some degree, and you know? I talk to God like he's sitting next to me and I'm like, my human mind questions certain things but my heart tells me to, you know, just be patient, be faithful, you know…whatever. So, I just I pray for my um, I always say in my prayers… pray for a… like I said before my mental health. I pray for
my, um, I pray for knowledge. I pray for understanding and but most of all, I pray for wisdom.

Isa highlighted the journey and growth that is involved while making the transition to spirituality. She did not define herself as a spiritual person until she grew into that part of her identity. Isa began her journey towards spirituality in childhood through the practice of religion because this was the ritual for her family. She shared that as she realized there was more to her faith than attending church, she began to find identity and comfort in spiritual practices. Prayer is a method of connecting with God, and she noted her interpersonal yet divine communication that provides answers, patience, faith, knowledge, and wisdom.

Anya stated,

Oh, meditations. I…at one point I was really, really just meditating a lot, like every day and uh, and doing different types. I love water meditations and I've also done a few mirror meditations… which are really intense. That definitely gets you to a point where it’s like wow, okay, it's just me. It’s me, myself, and I in this mirror and it’s just so open and vulnerable and I think a lot of times, especially as a Black woman, that you tried not to seem so vulnerable to where, here are all these emotions that come up and all of these experiences and it's like wow, this is… this is it… and this is you… and this is how you dealt with it.

Anya’s journey is unique from the others because of her deep use of meditation as a method of coping and healing. The use of mediation is a time of stillness in which Anya turns inward to find the answers within herself. Anya
discussed that she was introduced to mirror and water meditations by a close friend, which she initially doubted the powerfulness of these interventions for herself. She noted that it was an experience that allowed her to be vulnerable and open in a way that Black women cannot be.

Alexann shared,

I spent time in the Bible. I find scriptures, umm, that gives me peace that…that gives me confidence in who I am. Who says, I'm the head and not the tail above only Who says I'm blessed. I’d find those scriptures and I meditate on ‘em and I read them over and over, and anytime during the day something comes up…. whatever the scripture is for me at that moment …I'm speaking in my mind. And I'm seeing and even though she's [former boss] rolling her eyes at me and fussing… and I'm… peace within because I got the scripture that I'm holding onto. That is what gives me that confidence and the healing that I need.

Alexann discussed how she engaged in her spirituality to cope with workplace oppression. She described how she relied on her closeness with God and scripture to find comfort in an experience with her White, female boss. Despite the attempts to discredit and dehumanize Alexann in the workplace, she found relief and confidence from scriptures and reflection to manage the situation.

Soraya stated,

I wouldn't consider myself, like one of those…um, 'cause I don't go to church on a regular basis, um, I sort of went through a spiritual crisis at some point in my life. Um and it was mostly just from childhood
experiences growing up in church and just individual experiences of, you
know, being in particular, a church…you know a church that sort of
brought back childhood memories, so, you know, just very unique
differences and growing up in a Black church. You know that…. you
know some of them are great! You know they…they're a large part of our
identity…. for some of us, but um… also recognizing how those shapes
how we view church and our identity, and um…what's considered being a
Christian, if you don't go to church every day and stay for three services
and you know, here even if you missed a church service or something, you
know something like that.

Anya stated,

I feel like in order to experience religion or any of it, you have to embark
on your own journey versus what you've been told and what you've been
taught. I had this conversation with a friend of mine when we were talking
about religion and spirituality. I was like, well, what did you grow up
believing and what did you grow up knowing? …that you're not supposed
to stray away from what you've been taught. And it's like who's to say
what we've been taught is the correct way…. who's to say just because
that's what our parents and grandparents and great grandparents and great-
great grandparents were doing…like it's more to us than just that, like
what were our ancestors and stuff beforehand doing?

Soraya and Anya both brought a focus onto the individualized journey of
making meaning of experiences of spirituality and understanding the meaning of
religion to them. Soraya discussed the influence of the Black church and the impact of her childhood experiences. Soraya acknowledged that she remembers growing up in the church, and her adult experiences of religion have pushed her away from religion. Despite Soraya’s spiritual crisis, the circumstances that surround the development of identities in relation to the Black church remain an individualized experience that is processed differently for Black women. She has resisted religion and shifted towards spirituality to avoid the rituals and structures of religion and consequences that could arise should one resist the Black church. These experiences caused Soraya to explore the significance of religion and spirituality.

Anya engaged in her own personal journey of spirituality as well. She mentioned that she shifted from religion to spirituality following her internal questioning of what she learned growing up as a child and coming to the question of if that information was what she was choosing to believe and follow as an adult. Anya shared that she has reached out to friends to discuss the difference that each held related to religion and spirituality. She explained that she and her friend both have resisted what they have been taught as children about religion by engaging in a process of questioning what they believed to be true based on their understanding and reality. Questioning this knowledge, for Anya was a process of her identity and not her declining the wisdom of her ancestors but developing a process of her personal understanding and belief of religion.

Isa shared,
I mean like I said, when praying or whatever. It's more like a conversation, and I'm exposing my feelings and kind of leave it at the altar, so to speak up and old saying goes, “if we’re gonna pray, why worry? If we worry, why pray?” So, and, you know, I keep the idea that as much, and as a child again, I don't know what I did, um, but, you know, like now…it’s like when I'm praying… I'm praying for… I always say… I'm praying for my loved ones. My friends, I pray for strangers. And I pray for people who may even consider themselves to be my enemies, and those are verbatim words that I utilize in my prayer, like… I pray for everyone. I pray for those in my home, in my community, in my city. In my states… in my United States, based in my country, um… in… in the world. Like, 'cause after like… um, with this pandemic… we… we all need some healing. It's attacking our generations to come. If our… if our babies can't go to school and get an education and prepare to be the leaders of the world… like, where do we have to look forward to?

Anya stated,

Spirituality to me is finding… finding peace and finding God and then allowing God to take control. Because I can say that’s one problem, I have… is being controlled. I like things to go how I like them to go. Spirituality is you being able to really have that release and find that ummm… find that… find that loophole kind of, to be vulnerable and release… and who better to be vulnerable with then God? You can pray. You lay it all out, and even when you meditate like… it’s you. You're able
to release everything and just... and it's a very enlightened moment and your body just feels so much better once you're able to lay it all down ... lay it all out there and put it all out there and it's just like, okay, wow, I don't feel as heavy as I was feeling at first.

Soraya disclosed,

So, um, during those years, I did sort of become more of a spiritual person… I guess where I just sort of ministered to myself in whatever way I decide is necessary at that point. And so, I gravitate to a couple of verses that, individually to me are powerful, um, for things that have gone on and, in my life, and in the life of my family.

Alexann shared,

There’s such great confidence to think that… of being… Creator of heaven and earth, almighty God, who knows all… is talking to me? I could actually hear his voice? Just like wow! It blows my mind. So, it's just… it's just builds… it again gives me that confidence in who I am and whose I am … that I belong to him…. that there is a creator that… that cares about me, that loves me… that is concerned about the very number hairs on my head, you know?

Isa shared her use of prayer to talk to God in the form of a conversation and make requests of safety and healing for not only herself but her family, friends, and community. She uses prayer to seek protection for children so that they can grow into future leaders. Isa also shared that a coping method of prayer
is to be vulnerable and expose her feelings but to place those feelings “at the
alter” to give them to God. She relieves those emotions through prayer.

Anya shared similarities with Isa as she discussed a release that is
experienced when she copes using prayer and meditation. An enlightening
moment is described as Anya explained that spirituality allows her to relinquish
control and be vulnerable to accept help. When asked about the shift toward
spirituality, Soraya shared that her process of engaging in spirituality took place
independently. She explained that she directs her path of spiritual healing based
on what she believes is best for her during that experience.

Alexann identifies as both a spiritual and religious Christian woman. The
influences of both have served as powerful factors in her life. She finds comfort and
confidence in her relationship and communication with God. Alexann described a sense
of unconditional love and care that is received in this relationship. For Alexann, this is
powerful and meaningful for her life and experiences. Overall, her personal relationship
and connection with a divine being provide her comfort and direction against adversity.
Even more so, Alexann utilizes fasting and prayer to seek guidance when she feels lost
and attempting to heal from distressing experiences.

Summary

This chapter provided insight into the diversity of experiences, pain, and healing
methods that utilized by the participants. The three themes co-constructed with the
narrative of the participants included: (a) navigating multiple roles: a source of strength
and stress, (b) Black women (re)defining mental health, and (c) finding comfort and
healing through spiritual practices. Improvisation, daughtering, and Black/endarkened
feminist theory granted a pure reflection and effort of meaning-making that embraces and acknowledges the lived experiences of Black women. Narrative inquiry provided access to the stories and narratives of the participants when they had otherwise been silenced. The use of unstructured interviews provided open and inviting dialogue between each participant for deep interaction and a space of safety and me. Presented in an unaltered and genuine manner, the participants’ unique lived experiences are privileged without judgment and with care in this research study. The final chapter will conclude with a brief introduction, discussion of the study, implications for theory and practice, further research recommendations, and concluding remarks.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the conclusions and implications of this study. The current study used a Black feminist/endarkened feminism narrative inquiry research design to describe the lived experiences of Black women’s mental health and methods of spiritual healing from intersecting oppressions. As a Black/endarkened feminist researcher, I have sought to privilege the experiences of Black women as they navigate a world of oppression and seek acknowledgment of their lived experiences and knowledge production process. This study explored how Black women have processed and narrated their experiences of mental health and how they have used spirituality as a coping and healing mechanism against oppression. Additionally, this study focused on the participants’ stories and realities of multiple role engagement, mental health, and spiritual healing for acknowledgment, space, and meaning making of their truths and lived experiences. The results of this study identified three common themes: (a) navigating multiple roles: as a source of strength and stress, (b) Black women (re)defining mental health, and (c) finding comfort and healing through spiritual practices from the stories of the participants that illustrate how Black women narrate their experiences of mental health and the multiple coping mechanisms that are utilized in the healing process. This chapter will move into a discussion of the findings and the implications for theory and practice. The chapter will then conclude with the recommendations for further research and concluding remarks.

Discussion
In keeping with Black feminist and endarkened feminist theory, the focus of this study was utilizing lived experiences, narrative inquiry, and daughtering to highlight the diversity, creativeness, agency, and survival of Black women. To gather the unaltered stories of participants’ experiences of mental health, self-care, and healing, the study consisted of the following research questions:

1. How do Black women understand, process, and narrate their experiences and meanings of mental health?
   a. What role do the misrepresentations of Black women’s mental health have on the mental health of the participants of the study?

2. What are Black women’s methods of spiritual healing in terms of mental health?

The findings revealed that the participants were empowered to take control of harmful deficit-fueled narratives and controlling images of Black women to (re)define their identities and take back their stories of reality. While Black women continue to exhibit an image of strength, one must not forget that Black women are not immune to adversity and struggle to maintain emotional well-being (Woods-Giscombé et al., 2016). While Black women took on multiple roles, there was an inability on their part to say no to those who needed their help, guidance, and protection. This provided both a sense of strength and meaning and served as a stressor in their lives. Anya, Alexann, Isa, Soraya discussed the impact of diverse adverse experiences such as loss, family health concerns, increased stress, (mis)representations of their mental health, and how they engaged in spiritual healing. They provided counter-narratives of resistance that deconstructed controlling images and placed control of their stories into their hands. The findings also
revealed the use of spirituality as a method of healing and empowerment. Commonalities in prayer, meditation, and faith as healing mechanisms were found despite the unique experiences of loss, mental health struggles, and personal growth towards spirituality. Black women emphasize the importance of strong relationships and interconnectedness to share the stories of survival, expose their emotional vulnerabilities, and engage in the process of healing.

To ensure that I was genuine and authentic to my research, my participants, and myself, I analyzed and interpreted the data using the method of daughtering interwoven with both the foundations of Black feminist and Endarkened feminist theory, which highlighted the quest to deconstruct dominant ideology that has attempted to silence the voices of Black women (Evans-Winters, 2019). My research is not meant for outsiders but for Black women and girls that have shared lived experiences. I have used daughtering to decode the experiences and emotions of Anya, Soraya, Alexann, and Isa and to ultimately highlight their journeys of mental health and spirituality in their unaltered forms. Influenced entirely by daughtering, I co-constructed the following findings as to the processes in which Black women narrate their lived experiences of mental health, resisting oppression, and spirituality as (a) navigating multiple roles: a source of strength and stress, (b) Black women (re)defining mental health, and (c) spiritual healing and coping practices.

**Navigating Multiple Roles: A Source of Strength and Stress**

The experiences of racism, sexism, discrimination, and erasure contribute to mental health struggles in Black women (Abrams et al., 2019; Jones & Guy-Sheftall, 2015). In addition to the lived experiences of oppression, Black women are also
subjected to increased psychological distress due to the multiple roles that they take, navigate, manage within their lives, most of which are by a perceived obligation (Jones & Guy-Sheftall, 2015; Woods-Giscombé et al., 2016). The roles and identities of Black women as presented as a subtheme that further explained roles that are navigated and managed daily. The findings revealed that Black women would experience increased stress due to the multiple roles they take on within their lives, including being mothers, daughters, caregivers, students, protectors, and problem solvers, while simultaneously expressing an obligation to take on these roles. The research indicates that Black women’s increased stress can be influenced by issues related to gender and ethnicity (Catabay et al., 2019, p. 144). Each participant noted they are described within their families as “the strongest” or most capable at handling familial stressors. Abrams et al., (2019) suggested that under the identification as a strong Black woman, one “…independently assumes a multiplicity of roles, chief among them are provider and caretaker” (p. 518). It is admirable that the participants are protectors, problem-solvers, and superwomen because it signifies their resiliency against adversity; however, it also overshadows the need for self-care (see Abrams et al., 2019).

Even as Black women find strength and purpose in serving in these roles for their loved ones, there is also an impact on emotional well-being and self-care. Black, Murry, Cutrona, and Chen (2009) suggest that “…the salience of social roles in women’s lives suggest that maintaining varied responsibilities in multiple contexts evince cost and benefits to women’s health” (p. 148). In this study, the cost to the participants was the lack of self-care and overload of role responsibilities that contributed to burnout and feeling overwhelmed.
In the initial interview question that asked participants to describe who they were, each participant immediately provided characteristics of their roles. Their responses were related to their identities as mothers to their children and the “mother” role and caregiver within their families. Boyd-Franklin (1989) notes that regarding the roles of the mother and the caregiver “…many Black women grow up with models of mothers, grandmothers, and aunts who have served in both roles in their families” despite being raised among different families, locations, and with differing experiences (p. 70). Anya, Isa, Alexann, and Soraya, all described themselves as women in their families that served as the backbone and primary support system, often placing the needs of others before themselves. There was an expressed perceived obligation that they must also uphold the role image of the “Black mother” and be the support system for others (Boyd-Franklin, 1989). The participants discussed this expectation from others, that urged them to take on additional role responsibilities even if it led to overload and stress. Abrams et al., (2019) note that “Black women have described being overwhelmed by pressures to embody strength and be resilient for their families and communities” (p. 518). For the participants, the multiple role responsibilities that are taken on created difficulty in allowing themselves space to cope and difficulty declining to manage increased responsibilities.

Mothering as a role expectation is not exclusive to those Black women who are biological mothers because this role is the instinct to “mother” extended family and those longing for a maternal figure (Boyd-Franklin, 1989). Anya’s work with teenagers in a residential facility, the residents often referred to her as their mother and expressed that they wished she was their mother. Anya said that her influence on the teenagers harbored
a strong, mothering relationship that she was not aware that she was creating. It was second nature. Anya’s developed relationships with these teenagers represented her ability to create mothering and nurturing relationships with non-biological children. The research also showed how Black women can become overburdened with the mother role. They are seen as a “switchboard” for receiving needs and requests at various times, family problem-solving, and managing communication (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Hill-Collins, 2000). While Alexann was engaging in mothering to solve her son’s issues, it is also recognized that can be seen as stressful, overprotective, and enmeshed. Soraya, Anya, and Isa are all identified in their families as those called on to help family members in need leading to overconcentrated power for one person and ultimately increased stress and feeling overwhelmed (Boyd-Franklin, 1989). This finding is supported by Davis and Jones (2021) who found that Black women’s strength is connected to the need to care for others while maintaining their independence, even if it means that they must sacrifice their own needs and self-care. The deep familial connection and perceived obligation to nurture their loved ones ultimately overshadowed personal goals and engagement in self-care.

The participants shared narratives, stories, emotions, and thoughts about the (mis)representations of mental health that have been experienced in their personal lives and within society. When participants were asked about their introduction and understanding of mental health, there were varied stories of individual mental health struggles, emotional distress, and increased stress. Alexann was introduced to the importance of mental health while in a doctoral class in which her professor highlighted
the use of meditation for coping and relaxation. Anya had a general introduction to mental health during her undergraduate experiences; her most powerful experience was her time of grieving her mother’s untimely passing. Soraya shared that mental health became a personal experience for her following a panic attack during a class and increased anxiety following the death of a family member. Each participant experienced mental health differently; however, they each expressed that their presentation of mental health and emotions have been inaccurately represented within society. In this study, I presented the participants’ stories and realities of multiple role engagement, mental health, and spiritual healing for acknowledgment, space, and meaning of their truths and lived experiences.

**Black Women (Re) defining Mental Health**

The participants provide a unique (re) narration of their experiences from a place of empowerment and resilience that resists the controlling images often placed upon them within society. Participants provided counternarratives to the controlling images that have historically defined and degraded Black women in society. The sources of strength and coping were shared as the participants noted that spirituality and a connectedness to other Black women were significant. Also discussed were the reality and (mis)representations of their lived experiences in dialogues that explored how inaccurate depictions of anger, strength, and complacency were poor attempts at understanding the experiences of Black women. For instance, participants described specific behaviors, thoughts, and emotions that have been represented inaccurately and then provided realistic ways of viewing their mental health. (Re) defining their mental health based on their lived experiences and realities served as a moment to name, (re)define, (re)narrate, and take control of
previously misrepresented narratives. This form of (re)narration and the act of (re)definition is a form of activism that places the power back into the hands of Black women regarding their stories and lived experiences (Collins, 2000). Anya discussed that Black women are seen as angry and “headstrong” simply because of their use of hand motions and tone when expressing their opinion. She rejected this notion and explained that this is the dynamism and expressiveness of Black women that she loves. Isa suggested that Black women are often “misunderstood” and that others do not put much effort into understanding the experiences of Black women truly and genuinely. She suggested that if there were simply a genuine effort to learn and understand Black women instead of judgment and bias, there would be more accurate representations and increased understanding of Black women's mental health. Soraya further exemplified Black women’s ability to (re)define their identity by rejecting the controlling images of being “an angry Black woman” or “aggressive” and suggested that Black women are at the forefront of leading movements or in the background supporting our most significant movements of all time (Hill-Collins, 2000). Using Black feminist theory, endarkened feminist theory, and daughtering in this research study are further acts of resistance that seek to reveal the unaltered stories of Black women and serve as a method of survival against oppressive structures (Evans-Winters, 2019, Hill-Collins, 2000).

I can also remember my actions in this doctoral program and employment where I actively attempted to (re)define the images of Black women as diverse, creative, powerful but most of all as human. I, like Soraya, put locs in my hair as a source of strength and as an act of resistance. The stories shared by the participants seek to (re)present their identity as not only strong women but overburdened Black women as
well. There is beauty in regaining control and power of our existence against adversity as Black women. To be empowered and heard as a Black woman increases confidence and builds a sense of trust among our circles. The participants’ act of (re) definition and resistance is the source of (re)visioning and (re)presenting that liberates Black women and puts our identities into the world (Dillard, 2016; Hill-Collins, 2000). The resistance to dominant and controlling images through (re)defining narratives of Black women leads to a sense of empowerment. To heal and cope with the impact of damaging narratives, the participants engaged in spiritual healing to guide and understand.

**Finding Comfort and Meaning through Spiritual Practices**

The role of spirituality as a healing and coping method within research has been left out as a viable factor due to its inability to be quantified and defined (Heath, 2006; McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021). There are also several ways for coping and healing to manage stress and overwhelm by Black women (Heath, 2006). Another finding is that while spirituality is a strong coping mechanism for Black women, there is also strength in social support from Black women who share similar experiences or share the unique experiences of living as Black women. This finding suggests that while spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation have a place in healing practices, there is also significance in the inclusion of interconnectivity, psychotherapy, and dialogue between Black women. Interconnectedness and dialogue between Black women with shared experiences served as an opportunity to share stories of pain and struggle with others who could allow them to be vulnerable and express their emotions. This finding is supported by Catabay et al. (2019) who also found that Black women “who have social networks with higher social support report better mental health and greater mental well-being (p.
144). The participants discussed the importance of these relationships to their healing. Psychotherapy provided additional support for participants’ mental health struggles and noted that it must be considered a viable and vital option in addition to embracing spiritual healing. To engage in the process of healing and coping, there is a diverse set of mechanisms that the participants found influential within their journeys.

As the women attempted to navigate through the different stages of their lives and under various circumstances, a process of seeking guidance and healing from lived experiences took place through spirituality (Dillard, 2000). The use of spirituality “serves as an internal coping mechanism when external mechanisms fail” when support, strength, and guidance are needed (Dill, 2017, p. 701). The participants shared how prayer, meditation, and connectedness with others were coping mechanisms to deal with increased stressors, multiple role responsibilities, and mental health struggles. Stories were reflected in which answers and resolutions were sought by internally (re)searching lessons previously taught to them by a divine spirit or ancestors (Dillard, 2000). This was specific to Isa, Soraya, and Anya, who all shared that their shift to spirituality took place as they grew into their individuality, separated their beliefs from the lessons learned in childhood, and explored the many aspects of spiritual healing. The value of spiritual practices for the participants indicates there are times when the answers are within, and there are times where the answers must be “spoken” to them by God, but they indicate that an answer and comfort will come to them. McClish-Boyd and Bhattacharya (2021) suggest that “spirituality provides the comfort of knowing that one is not alone and when recognizing that when life seems out of control and hopeless, there is a way out” (p. 544). The use of these practices for the participants was daily and interwoven in their lives and
are major underpinnings in Black women’s ability to find comfort and guidance in the practice of spirituality (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021).

The diversity of healing methods utilized by the participants exhibited that the healing arts of meditation, prayer, and dialogue have foundations in spirituality and “requires love of self, family, and the community, even when that love is not reciprocated” (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021, p. 543). Spirituality involves acts and feelings of unconditional love, and while it may not be reciprocated, love can serve as a motivating factor for healing interpersonally. The focus is not on those who have done us wrong but on fostering self-care and healthy well-being through acceptance. There was no battle that was too large for the participants to overcome when they placed themselves at the forefront of the healing process and invited themselves into the realm of spirituality. The participants’ stories revealed that the journey is not identical but diverse and unique and requires approaches to healing to be diverse as well. Aygepongo (2011) indicates that “…Black women resort to spirituality to cope with, confront, and resist their various experiences of oppression through the deepening of self-awareness it facilitates for them” (p. 180). This diversity allows for the complexity and uniqueness of Black women’s lives to be accounted for in implementing mental health and spiritual interventions. Also, there were multiple locations in which the participants embraced spirituality. Alexann was introduced to meditation and meaning making of experiences within the classroom and the church, while Isa embraced spirituality in her car and late at night while she was alone. Each participant noted their deep connection with God stating that they “speak” and “talk” to God as if they are there physically in their presence (Dillard, 2006).
Implications for Theory

This study’s findings support the use of Black feminist theory and Endarkened feminism in Adult Education. The data highlights the benefits of using theoretical frameworks founded by Black women to guide research into Black women’s experiences. This data illustrates the uniqueness of utilizing unaltered narratives and stories about mental health, intersectional oppression, and spiritual healing from Black women to inform theory and adult education. Furthermore, the use of Black feminist theory and Endarkened feminism enhance the visibility and accessibility of the realities of Black women and Black feminist discourse within adult education. Adult education reaches learners in settings beyond the formal classroom and encompasses non-formal and informal educational settings. Therefore, the use of Black feminist theory and Endarkened feminism in non-formal and informal settings can provide a greater reach to adult learners who may feel silenced and unacknowledged because they are outside of the scope of academia. Diverse educational environments can be transformed by incorporating Black/Endarkened feminist frameworks that value and offer accurate and appropriate representations of Black women’s lived experiences (Evans-Winters, 2019; Evans-Winters, 2021). Also, Black female adult learners can find strength, shared understanding, and increased cultural representation in settings where they have advocated for representation and acknowledgment in educational curriculums. The significance of applying these two theoretical perspectives is based on the visibility of Black women’s knowledge and ways of knowing and the push to empower Black women and girls by placing them as the subject of discourse. These theoretical perspectives privilege Black women’s experiences and have been developed from research focused on
understanding and researching their experiences. The construction of Black feminist critical methodology is intended to provide a more expansive view of shared experiences and illuminate the unique standpoints of Black women (Collins, 2000). Additionally, by making Black women the subject of the discourse, Black/endarkened feminist theory seeks to understand the meanings of the experiences of Black women and how Black women narrate their experiences. Meaning and gained knowledge are then communicated to Black women and for Black women.

The use of unaltered stories and experiences of Black women highlights the need for Black feminist theory and endarkened feminism as a means of acknowledgment and genuine understanding of Black women and girls that was previously dominated by ideologies based on controlling images and deficit-minded thinking about them. From this perspective, adult education can not only utilize more socially and culturally informed theories, but the field can join the activism and acts of resistance against (mis)representations, controlling images, and Eurocentric ideals that have dominated qualitative research and academia. This would include: (a) increasing the use of literature developed by Black women within course curriculums, (b) creating comprehensive educational programs and curriculums that center the lived experiences and knowledge production of Black women, and (c) increasing research within adult education that focuses on the needs and experiences of Black women. Further, increased use and teaching of Black/Endarkened theories in the field would support the growth and evolution necessary for the reinforcement, stability, and theory-building of these critical theoretical frameworks. We cannot effectively build theory with inaccuracies and (mis)representations, but it can be accomplished with realities and unaltered truths.
Lastly, Endarkened feminism allowed for the connection and inclusion of spirituality and cultures as a viable means of knowledge production. It offers insight into the commonly untouched phenomenon of spirituality and its significance to Black women and Black culture and families ((Dillard, 2006; Boyd-Franklin, 2010). Theoretical perspectives, such as Black feminist theory and Endarkened Feminism, privilege the silenced voices of Black women and create the space for acknowledgment, respect, and healing, therefore, allowing their lived experiences to be included in the knowledge production process and society.

This study also revealed that further research on daughtering as a method of analysis and interpretation is necessary. Evans-Winters (2019) explains that there is no guidebook to daughtering and that it is a tool that allows for improvisation and reflection of data. Daughtering allowed me to consider my personal experiences as a Black woman and daughter and my lived experiences of oppression and mental health that have compelled me to give voice and representation of Black women’s complexity. While improvisation allows for increased use of self-awareness and trust within oneself as a researcher, there is a lack of direction and support on how a researcher can reach a place of self-awareness. Improvisation required examining Black women’s ways of being, knowing, and living through their narratives, experiences, and stories (See Evans-Winters, 2021). It was used to find shared experiences of mental health and healing between the participants. I contend that improvisation is challenging to engage with if the researcher is not conscious of their purpose for engaging in research, personal and shared experiences related to the research topic, and journey of healing. It was most helpful for me to be nurtured and mentored throughout this research study as I was also deeply
connected to the research topic as a Black woman by my advisor and content areas specialist. The three of us had no prior guidance or experience with daughtering as a methodology; therefore, we navigated the study with care, a willingness to learn, and a willingness to be challenged on our previous ideas of research. At times, my experience utilizing daughtering was difficult to verbalize and write on paper because of the deep level of processing of past experiences and lessons taught in my role as a Black daughter.

The need for additional research primarily utilizing daughtering is also beneficial. I noticed that at times, I felt that I wanted more guidance on the process and more literature to guide me. This can occur with the increased use and modeling of the diverse ways and fields that daughtering can be used to transform qualitative research.

**Implications for Practice**

From the present study, there are several implications for practice within the field of adult education and fields with a focus on mental health. First, the study presented the support for the adult education field to place an increased emphasis and training on students utilizing critical methodologies within research. The increased focus on critical qualitative methodology increases utilization and further supports the creation of knowledge that resists a preference for a methodology that omits lived experiences, cultural representation, and emotion from research (Evans-Winters, 2019, 2021). Learners can be introduced to these methodologies within curriculums, educational series, literature, and training programs that provide experiential learning opportunities for utilizing critical methods and frameworks in diverse settings.

Next, this research has significance to the non-formal education setting such as community centers, webinars, libraries, seminars, neighborhood talks, and therapy
sessions, which Black women in the community are most likely to attend. This group of Black women is not necessarily in academia, but it is inclusive of the Black women who continue to meet the needs of others within their daily experiences. They are the mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, and teenage girls that simply want to navigate life with meaning, support, resources, and space. Creating a non-formal education setting that are attuned and developed from a perspective that understands the multiple roles of Black women privileges their lived experiences and unique shared experiences. Programs such as these can be designed with flexibility and culturally relevant practices that are in touch with educational needs and the social and emotional needs that drive Black women during every moment of the day. Emotional support programs, the use of social-emotional learning, and trauma-informed practices are examples that do not “do” interventions on Black women but “do” interventions “for” Black women.

Also, the development of mentoring for Black students and girls to provide a community of understanding and interconnectivity should be considered. The participants expressed the value of sharing their emotional needs with friends and others who have shared experiences like theirs, including the researcher. Examples of these mentoring programs would focus on storytelling for healing and coping and healing circles in which participants share their experiences of adversity for healing. A space dedicated to healing within educational settings provides an outlet for learners and offers support that is non-judgmental and accessible. These programs can also be incorporated as a fundamental part of adult education offered to Black women and all students. The development of these programs would be based on the unique knowledge set of Black women, which is often not prioritized in the program development of adult education.
Lastly, an increase in the number of Black mental health professionals and support groups for Black women and girls seeking education would be beneficial. The accessibility of quality and trained professionals who share the similar lived experiences of Black women increases the likelihood of Black women exploring not only psychotherapy but additional coping skills as well such as mentoring, exercise, meditation, spiritual practices, because there is a value placed on the shared experiences and understanding of what life is like as a Black woman.

**Further Recommendations for Research**

Advancement into the topic of Black women’s mental health and coping mechanisms can provide additional research into the role of adult education in incorporating spiritual practices such as meditation and deep interpersonal reflection with non-formal education settings. With further research into this area, researchers can explore the different spiritual practices that transform learners’ ability to cope with life’s many tasks that can take priority over learning. Further research into daughtering and improvisation within adult education settings can provide insight into the dynamic ways it can be used within multiple environments. The level of self-awareness that is needed to engage in this process is influential for participants and researchers who have struggled to see themselves represented accurately and culturally within qualitative research. Daughtering involves the rejection and questioning of all that we have been taught and calls on researchers to use their experiences throughout life to create new knowledge and understanding. Within a non-formal education setting that services Black women, daughtering can provide direction and knowledge in a manner that privileges our specific and transformational way of knowing. Research that expands beyond academic settings
and various community settings can provide insight into how Black women process and navigate their multiple life roles for survival. Including various settings and additional participants adds knowledge to a topic that remains disparately researched.

This study acknowledges that Black women not only benefit from individual interventions and support but that there also is a need for structural change within society. Social problems that exist to oppress Black women, such as inadequate healthcare, poverty, unemployment, and disproportional educational opportunities create a need for women to take on additional roles to ensure that their families can also survive. Developing individual and community coping methods and intervention programs are not enough to fully support Black women; therefore, micro-level intervention and macro-level intervention are needed. Recognizing that structural oppression contributes to the conditions of inequality and inequity enables Black feminist researchers to advocate for policy change and structural equity. This is also identified as an additional area for further research to explore diverse and effective methods of creating equitable change.

Advancing the topic of study can also assist in creating educational guides and culturally responsive interventions in adult education and mental health specific to the unique needs of Black women. Distinctive and innovative interventions can be explored and evaluated for their effectiveness among Black women, thus adding to the evidence-based practices within mental health and education. Research in this area does not exclude any Black women and can add to the justification of spirituality within adult education and mental health fields. Additional research into the use of spirituality for finding meaning and purpose in experiences and self-awareness can be beneficial to
developing interventions that acknowledge the Black women’s ways of knowing and healing.

**Concluding Remarks**

The unique and unaltered experiences of Black women offer renewed insight and perspective into their methods of spiritual healing, self-care, and experiences of mental health. This study revealed that Black women have experienced the impact of controlling images, (mis)representations of mental health and lived experiences, role overload, and lack of engagement in their self-care. Also revealed was that while Black women are subjected to these stressors, there is also a developed source of strength and shift towards coping and healing from past experiences of adversity and oppression. As this study demonstrates, Black women engage in the process of (re)defining and (re)narrating their stories as a sense of empowerment and as an act of resistance to the dominant ideology. This is an immense benefit to researching the lived experiences of Black women in the field of adult education. However, the benefit to Black women and girls is immeasurable as we seek to create spaces for our stories, knowledge, and ways of knowing within society. This study serves as an act of love and acknowledgment for Black women and girls.
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Appendix A

Informed Consent

Consent for Research Participation

Title

A Narrative Study of Black Women’s Mental Health and Spiritual Healing

Researcher(s)

Chanda M. Dunn, LCSW, The University of Memphis

Researchers Contact Information

(706) 318-4775, cdunn6@memphis.edu

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The box below highlights key information for you to consider when deciding if you want to participate. More detailed information is provided below the box. Please ask the researcher any questions about the study before you make your decision. If you volunteer, you will be one of about 5 people to do so.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Information for You to Consider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voluntary Consent:</strong> You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> The purpose of this research is to describe how Black women narrate, process, and heal from experiences of intersecting oppressions and mental health through spirituality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duration:</strong> It is expected that your participation will last over the course of one month and consist of two one-hour interview sessions and no more than two one-hour follow-up sessions. Due to the nature of this study, the researcher will communicate with participants an ongoing basis if they choose to be involved. You will be asked a series of questions about your desire to be involved in the study long-term and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Procedures and Activities: You will be asked to participate in two one-hour interview sessions and no more than two follow-up sessions.

Risk: There are no physical, social, legal, or other risks associated with participating in this study. Since the study does ask questions related to mental health and experiences of oppression, there may be some unintended psychological consequences or emotional distress. Consequently, should participants experience psychological concerns during the course of the study, they will be referred to community service providers and mental health resources delivered to them upon request. Additionally, participants will be notified of their right to cease participation at any time during the course of the interview or study if emotional distress occurs. NOTE: If you are a student and you decide not to take part in this study, your choice will not affect your academic status or grade in any way.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits for participants to participate in this study. The potential societal benefits are contributing to the unique research within the field.

Alternatives: Participation is voluntary, and the only alternative is to not participate.

Who is conducting this research?

Chanda Dunn, LCSW of the University of Memphis, Department of Leadership is in charge of the study. Her faculty advisor and dissertation committee chair is Edith Gnanadass, PhD.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this research is to describe how Black women narrate, process, and heal from experiences of intersecting oppression and mental health through spirituality. You are being invited to participate because you identify as a Black or African American woman, age 18 or older who has experienced oppression, mental health struggles and healing methods, and has no severe level of mental impairment or severe psychiatric illness.

How long will I be in this research?

The research will be conducted at various locations in Memphis, Tennessee such as college campuses, libraries, private spaces in public shops, or through virtual methods. It should take approximately two to four hours of total participation time. Participants will be asked to meet for two unstructured interviews either in-person or through a virtual platform. Each interview will be approximately one hour. If needed, participants will be asked to take part in no more than two one-hour follow-up sessions to clarify parts of your interviews or transcripts or confirm the researcher’s interpretation of data.
What happens if I agree to participate in this Research?

If you agree you will be asked to meet either in-person or via virtual platform to provide demographic information and answer a series of questions. You can expect each interview to take approximately one hour. During this interview, your responses will be audio recorded (in-person) or recorded via a virtual platform and saved on a password protected USB device. The interview questions will involve discussing difficult experiences in which you may wish not to disclose such as, “Part of this study is to discuss Black women’s experiences of mental health. If you don’t mind sharing, tell me your story/stories of racism as a Black woman.” During the interview, you have the right to only answer the questions which feel comfortable and safe for you to do so. Additionally, you have the right to cease participation during the interview at any time. The procedures for withdrawal are simply for the participant to cease participation.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

Information collected for this research will be used for a dissertation publication and potential journal articles and arts-based publications. Identifiable information will not be available in the publication of this research. Although we may publish/present the results of this research, your name will not be used in any published reports, conference presentations, or arts-based work. All identifying information will remain confidential and all data saved such as transcriptions, interview recordings, and scanned paperwork will be saved under a chosen pseudonym and password protected in on an encrypted file on a password protected storage device.

How will my privacy and data confidentiality be protected?

We promise to protect your privacy and security of your personal information as best we can. Although you need to know about some limits to this promise. Measures we will take include:

- Any recordings from the interviews will be transcribed and the original recordings destroyed.

- If interviews are recorded via a virtual platform, the virtual platform will be required to meet HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) compliance procedures to ensure the safety of participants. Recorded sessions will be downloaded onto a USB portable device with a password protection and stored in a lockbox with a code.

- Data will be scrubbed of any identifying characteristics, such as proper names, place names, et cetera. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms, which will be known only to the lead researcher.
• Data will be stored on a qualitative data management and analysis program (NVIVO). Access to this program will be limited to the Lead Investigator and stored on a password protected computer.

• All identifying information will remain confidential and all data saved such as transcriptions, interview recordings, and scanned paperwork will be saved under a chosen pseudonym and password protected in an encrypted file on a password protected USB drive.

• The data will be kept for the duration of the project and up to 7 years pending multiple research projects or publications with the data.

Individuals and organization that monitor this research may be permitted access to inspect the research records. This monitoring may include access to your private information and interview transcripts. These individuals and organizations include:

• Institutional Review Board
• The Lead Investigator’s dissertation advisor
• The research study methodologist

For studies in which mandatory reporting is a requirement, the following state must be included:

Research team members are required to report the following if a team member suspects child abuse or neglect, or suicidal thoughts. TN Laws may require this suspicion be reported. In such case, the research team may be obligated to breach confidentiality and may be required to disclose personal information.

What are the risks if I participate in this research?

Although there is no physical risk associated with this study, there exists the potential for emotional distress. Participants in this study will be asked to revisit a time in their lives that may evoke emotional memories. You may experience stress and emotional distress associated with participating in a research study.

What other choices do I have besides participating in this research?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

What if I want to stop participating in this research?
It is up to you to decide whether you want to volunteer for this study. It is also okay to decide to end your participation at any time. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you decided to withdraw your participation. Your decision about participating will not affect your relationship with the researcher(s) or the University of Memphis. Your decision about participating will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of Memphis.

**Will it cost me money to take part in this research?**

There are no costs associated with participation in this research study

**Will I receive any compensation or reward for participating in this research?**

You will not be compensated for taking part in this research.

**Who can answer my question about this research?**

Before you decide to volunteer for this study, please ask any questions that might come to mind. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Chanda Dunn, LCSW at cdunn6@memphis.edu or Dr. Edith Gnanadass at gnnadass@memphis.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-2705 or email irb@memphis.edu. We will give you a signed copy of this consent to take with you.
STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have had the opportunity to consider the information in this document. I have asked any questions needed for me to decide about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions through the study.

By signing below, I volunteer to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been given a copy of this consent document. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, my legal representative or I may be asked to consent again prior to my continued participation.

As described above, you will be audio recorded while performing the activities described above. Audio recordings will be used for the transcription of the interviews. The anticipated storage date is no longer than 90 days. The data will be kept for the duration of the project and up to 7 years pending multiple research projects or publications with the data. Initial the space below if you consent to the use of audio recording as described.

_____ I agree to the use of (audio recording)

_________________________________  _______________________________  ______________
Name of Adult Participant    Signature of Adult Participant    Date

Please provide your preferred method of contact:

___________________________________
(Phone Number or Email)

Researcher Signature (To be completed at the time of Informed Consent)

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent and freely consent to participate.

_________________________________  _______________________________  ______________
Name of Research Team Member    Signature of Research Team Member    Date

Researcher: Chanda Dunn, LCSW, The University of Memphis. Email: cdunn@memphis.edu
Appendix B

Vulnerability and Criteria Screening

Screening Questions (to assess manner of verbally interacting and to assess vulnerability and anything that may adversely impact the study)

1. Do you self-identify as a Black or African American woman?

2. Are you at least 18 years of age?

3. Do you enjoy storytelling and/or sharing in-depth personal accounts of your lived experiences?

4. Do you have knowledge and experience of personal mental health concerns and coping strategies?

5. Are you now, or have you ever been diagnosed with a mental health issue? If so, specify which.

6. Are you currently taking any medications for mental health issues? If so, specify which.

7. Are you now, or have you ever been in therapy?

8. Can you think of anything currently going on in your life that causes you to feel vulnerable or distressed?

9. What are some of the ways that you deal with issues that cause you to feel vulnerable or distressed?
Appendix C

Interview Guide

Project: To describe the lived experiences of mental health, intersecting oppressions, and healing of Black women.

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

Name of Interviewee (Pseudonym):

Location/Setting:

Informed Consent: Please sign the informed consent detailing your agreement to participate in this research activity.

Introduction to the Research

I really want to thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. For most of my career, I have been invested in improving the lives and wellbeing of Black women, their families, and communities, so I am glad you’ve joined me in that process. As a brief background about me, I want to let you know that I am 4th year doctoral candidate here at the University of Memphis. I am also a Licensed Clinical Social Worker practicing here in Memphis as well. I provide mental health intervention however today; I am not working in that capacity. During our time together, you are the expert of your life, and I am the listener. You’re welcome to ask more about me if you’d like later during the interview or now.

As you saw in the consent, I am going to be asking you questions about specific events of your life. I am really hoping that our conversation will flow freely and that you will feel open to discuss anything that comes up for you. I am interested in hearing your
experiences as you would like to share them. I will mostly be asking questions about your past experiences and how those past experiences have played a role in your life as a Black woman.

Some of the topics that I will ask about are your family background, personal experiences of mental health, racism and sexism as a Black woman, spirituality, and ways of coping and healing. Of course, you can discuss any topics you find significant to your experiences or this study.

Interview Questions

1. Before we dive into the questions related to my research, I would love it if you could tell me a little bit about yourself and who you are. What do you like to do?
   How old are you?
   Who would you consider to be part of your family?
   What do you do for a living?

2. What does it mean for you to identify as a Black woman?
   Probe 1: What are some of the things that you love the most about being a Black woman?
   Probe 2: What are some of the hardest parts, for you, about being a Black woman in our culture?
   Probe 3: What are some of the most influential moments that you have experienced as a Black woman?

3. As a Black woman, how do you understand or define mental health?
Probe 1: Do you remember when mental health became something you thought about? If yes, can you tell me about that time in your life?

Probe 2: Were there any significant people or relationships with others that were a part of that experience?

4. In your opinion, what are some unique challenges that Black women experience related to their mental health?

5. In what ways have your experiences of mental health been misrepresented or stereotyped during your life?

Probe 1: In what ways, if any, have you found that your experiences have been represented accurately within society?

6. When you have struggled with your mental health in the past, what have you done to cope?

Probe 1: Can you give a specific example of something that has been hard for you and how you coped? (Use this only if this doesn’t come up organically)

7. In what ways have you engaged in the healing to cope with your experiences of oppression and mental health throughout your life?

Probe 1: As a Black woman, how do you define healing?

Probe 2: Where or how did you learn about the coping methods you may have used in the past?

8. Have you used spirituality to heal from these experiences and mental health?

(Used if Question 7, does not include spirituality)

Probe 1: How do you define spirituality?
Probe 2: Can you give a specific example(s) of how you have used spirituality in your journey of healing and coping?

9. What was the most powerful spiritual experience of your life?

Probe 1: How did that experience impact your mental health and well-being?

10. Is there anything connected to your identity as a Black woman, your mental health, or your spirituality that you think I should know about, but we didn’t discuss?

<p>| Interview Questions and Sub-Questions | RQ1: How do Black women understand, process, and narrate their experiences and meaning of mental health? | RQ1 Sub-question: What role does misrepresentations of Black women’s mental health have on the mental health of the participants of the study? | RQ2: What are Black women’s methods of spiritual healing in terms of mental health? |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Q1: Tell me about your experiences as a Black woman and mental health. | X | |
| Probe 1: How do you define mental health? | | |
| Q2: Tell me your story/stories related to your experiences and meaning as a Black woman. | X | |
| Probe 1: Discuss and describe where this event took place? | | |
| Probe 2: Who was there? What emotions or feelings did you experience? | X | |
| Q3: You told your story/stories of racism. Tell me about how this experience(s) impacted your mental health. | X | |
| Probe 1: Describe how being a Black woman made this experience unique. | | X |
| Q4: In what ways has your experiences of | X | X |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mental health been misrepresented or stereotyped during your life?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probe 1: In what ways have you found that your experiences of have been represented accurately within society?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5: Tell me about the ways that you have coped or managed your mental health?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Q6: In what ways have you engaged in the healing to cope with your experiences of oppression and mental health throughout your life?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probe 1: How do you define healing?</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q7: What was the most powerful spiritual experience of your life?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probe 1: How did that experience impact your mental health and well-being?</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

Recruitment Communication

Volunteers wanted for a research study
Title: A Narrative Study of Black Women’s Mental Health and Spiritual Healing
Lead Investigator: Chanda Dunn, LCSW

The purpose of this research is to describe how Black women narrate, process, and heal from experiences of intersecting oppression and mental health through spirituality.

The research will take approximately one to three months to complete. Over the course of one to three months, the research with the lead investigator will consist of two in-person (physical or through web conference according to COVID-19 safety guidelines) interviews lasting one hour for each interview. If needed, participants will be asked to take part in no more than two one-hour follow-up sessions.

If you or anyone you know identifies as Black, female, is 18 years or older, enjoys storytelling, and has knowledge about the role of mental health and spirituality in their lives, please consider participating. The study will include two one-hour open-ended question interviews and one to two one-hour follow-up sessions.

There are no direct benefits from participating in this study. There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. Participants in this study will be asked to revisit a time in their lives that may evoke emotional memories. You may experience stress and emotional distress associated with participating in a research study. Your willingness to take part, however, may, in the future, help society better understand this research topic.

Compensation for participation is not provided. Participation is strictly voluntary. To learn more about this research, please contact the lead investigator, Chanda Dunn, LCSW, at cdunn6@memphis.edu. This research is conducted under the direction of the College of Education, University of Memphis. (If interested, please read, and sign the attached Consent Form). Thank you. Respectfully,

Chanda Dunn, LCSW
Appendix E
IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board
Division of Research and Innovation Office of Research Compliance University of Memphis
315 Admin Bldg
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

July 27, 2021

PI Name: Chanda Dunn
Co-Investigators:
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Edith Gnanadass
Submission Type: Initial
Title: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF BLACK WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES OF MENTAL HEALTH AND SPIRITUAL HEALING
IRB ID: #PRO-FY2021-437

Expedited Approval: July 26, 2021

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed your submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. When the project is finished, a completion submission is required
2. Any changes to the approved protocol requires board approval prior to implementation
3. When necessary submit an incident/adverse events for board review
4. Human subjects training is required every 2 years and is to be kept current at citiprogram.org.

For additional questions or concerns, please contact us at irb@memphis.edu or 901.6783.2705

Thank you,
James P. Whelan, Ph.D. Institutional Review Board Chair The University of Memphis.