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**Race, Weight, Gender And The Embodied (Odiel, Odied) Consciousness Of Big-Bodied
Black Women Educators: A Phenomenological Study**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in Education at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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May 2022

Acknowledgements

First, always, and forever, I give unashamed praise and glory to my life's mighty and divine head, God the Father. Thank you, Lord, for giving me the vision, community, and support for this ambitious undertaking.

My committee members, beginning with my chair, advisor, and friend, Dr. Hillary Parkhouse, thank you for your generous guidance and counsel throughout my doctoral journey. I am grateful for your enthusiasm and encouragement of my big ideas. Your mentorship and generosity of spirit have sustained me. Also, thank you for introducing me to my BFF! Dr. Danielle Apugo, thank you for affirming me and encouraging me. Thank you for being so willing to hold space for me when I needed it most. To Dr. Kimberly Brown, thank you for challenging me, pushing me, and keeping me honest. I am grateful for your frank feedback and the knowledge you shared throughout this dissertation process. Dr. Bill Muth, I am continuously thankful and awed by the depths of your curiosity, kindness, and compassion. Thank you for introducing me to the beautiful world of phenomenology, and thanks in advance for answering all my future questions about it!

To my collaborators— Belle, Deborah, Hannah, Octavia, and Serena— thank you for undertaking this journey with me. Because of your contributions to this study, I can look back over this experience and look forward to what's to come and know that we produced something extraordinary, necessary, and revolutionary together.

To my parents, Ronald and Beverly Johnson, my love and appreciation for the two of you is deep and eternal. There are not enough words to express how thankful I am for your unwavering support. Your love and encouragement have been two of my biggest blessings. Thank you for giving me the space to believe I can do anything and the security of knowing that

you have had my back every step of the way. I am also grateful for your help with His Royal Highness King Cheechabod Lamont Johnson (aka, the best dog in the world) when the stresses of doc student life were all-consuming.

To my brother, Ron J., I am so grateful for the laughter you bring into my life! I admire your ability to find humor in just about anything. Thank you for helping me do the same. You are one of the best hypemen in the world, and I'm so glad to have you in my corner cheering me on.

My sister-friends, homegirls, play cousins, and Wellness for Black Doc Students family, thank you for gassing me, laughing with me, praying with me and over me, and everything in between. It is a gift to be loved and supported by each of you. I'm so glad I'm gang!

I am so thankful for all the prayers, acts of kindness, and encouragement from the rest of my village— family, friends, church community, Robinson Theater family, OES/Prince Hall family, and countless others. There are many people to thank and recognize, but to name you all would require a manuscript double the length of this dissertation! Just know that I appreciate each of you.

Lastly, to Beyoncé, if you only knew how many times I mentioned your name during my doctoral journey. The people out here really think we're cousins! If you ever read my dissertation, which I hope you will, I want to thank you for being a light in my life and the lives of so many Black girls and women.

Abstract

RACE, WEIGHT, GENDER AND THE EMBODIED (ODIED, ODIED) CONSCIOUSNESS OF BIG-BODIED BLACK WOMEN EDUCATORS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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Big-Bodied Black women in the United States have perpetually navigated the veritable dichotomy of being hyper-visible and invisible (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Fleetwood, 2001; Strings, 2019). Fat Black female bodies have borne the burden of exaggerated tropes and exploitation throughout history, stripping them of their femininity and humanity and resulting in a unique form of objectification (Strings, 2019). Inconsistent messages about BBWs, their bodies, and their value in society have endured for generations. They have been essential in constructing the controlling images of Black womanhood in the U.S. (Collins, 2000). The controlling images all evoked thoughts about the suitability of Black women as laborers and leaders (Collins, 2020). Under the dominant gaze, Black women have been best suited for low-skilled domestic and service-related jobs like childcare and teaching. These assumptions become even more problematic when considered along with nineteenth- and twentieth-century concerns about the professionalization of teaching (Ingersoll, 2018; Labaree, 1992). During that time, teaching became “prototypical women’s work” and synonymous with notions of motherhood and caregiving (Labaree, 1992). The professionalization of teaching and the iconography surrounding the BBW prompted questions about the intersectional effects of racialized sexism and anti-fat bias on the lived experiences of BBW educators. The purpose of the present phenomenological study was to explore the particularities of embodiment for BBWs

in academic contexts. The tenets of Black feminism, womanism, intersectionality, and the theory of excess flesh contributed to a dialectical framework that helped me analyze participants' accounts of individual experiences and elucidate the structures of the phenomenon of being a BBW educator. The findings from this study will be helpful in efforts to resolve the crisis of recruiting, retaining, and supporting Black women educators (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017) and remove the barriers that prevent discursive bodies from having equitable access to educational institutions in general.

Keywords: Black feminism, fat studies, controlling images, intersectionality, Black or African American women teachers

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**Race, Weight, Gender And The Embodied (O) (d) Consciousness Of Big-Bodied
Black Women Educators: A Phenomenological Study**

The Fat Black Woman Remembers

The fat black woman
Remembers her Mama
And them days of playing
The Jovial Jemima

tossing pancakes
to heaven
in smokes of happy hearty
murderous blue laughter

Starching and cleaning
O yes scolding and wheedling
pressing little white heads
against her big-aproned breasts
seeing down to the smallest fed
feeding her own children on Satanic bread

But this fat black woman ain't no Jemima
Sure thing Honey/ Yeah

(Nichols, 1984, p. 5)

Chapter 1

Big-bodied Black women (BBWs) in the United States (U.S.) have continuously traversed the veritable paradox of being hyper-visible and invisible (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Fleetwood, 2001; Strings, 2019). Throughout history, the fat Black female body has borne the burden of exaggerated tropes and exploitation, denuding it of femininity and humanity and resulting in a peculiar form of objectification (Strings, 2019). Since the 16th century, white skin and thin physiques have arbitrarily served as moral, racial, and national superiority markers. White people used the categories to delineate who was considered a citizen and entitled to certain privileges and protections under the law (Strings, 2019). An article from *Harper's Bazaar* published in 1896 noted, "stoutness, corpulence, and surplusage of flesh were [desirable only]

among African savages” and seen as moral failures when found in other people (Strings, 2019, p. 4). The article’s assertion that people of African descent preferred thicker and fuller bodies to more slender ones has contributed to a half-told tale of the relationships Black people, specifically women-identifying individuals, have developed with their bodies (Purkiss, 2017). While Black women’s embrace of more curvaceous figures has been established as a truism in the literature about body aesthetics, the start of the 20th century marked the beginning of Black women professionals’ attempts to delineate between curvaceousness and corpulence. Black women used their physicality to align themselves more closely with the dominant culture’s notions of respectability (Hughes, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2018; Purkiss, 2017). During that time, Black women professionals began to reject fatness and distance themselves from the tropes and stereotypes that had shaped Black femininity and labor expectations in the U.S. (Collins, 2000; Purkiss, 2017).

Embodied Consciousness

Black women in the U.S. have long understood the interlocking effects of racism and sexism on their lived experiences (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1987; King, 1988). Because of that, Black women have developed specific epistemological and ontological maneuvers that have helped them navigate the material world. Linda Finlay (2011) defined ways of being as an embodied consciousness. She wrote:

The lived body [develops] an *embodied consciousness* which engages with the surrounding world... pre-reflectively, without thought-- the body having its own wisdom and memory... is a point of view: it opens up the world as a world of possibilities and potentialities. (pp. 31 - 32)

Embodied consciousness considers the dualism of bodies being both subjects and objects. The subjective, agentic body moves through the world per its inhabitant's priorities. It is the body through which individuals understand the external built world (Finlay, 2011; Henneberg, 2018). In contrast, the objective body is the body that is always already ahead of the occupant. It is the version of the body that lacks personal sovereignty as meanings and mandates get projected onto it (Alcoff, 2006; Finlay, 2011; Jordan-Zachery, 2017). My treatment of the subjective and objective bodies as distinct entities was not done to fragment *being* but to emphasize the oscillatory duality of bodies, at once, being both subject and object. Schneider (1994, as cited in Fleetwood, 2017, p. 110) noted the condition of being both subject and object had forced women to “stand beside [themselves] in that [they] grapple overtly with the history of [their] bodies' explication, wrestling with the ghosts of that explication”. The experience of standing beside oneself has long been a part of the collective legacy of Black women. Black feminists have noted that Black women have a keen awareness of how their belonging to two oppressed groups has demarcated a unique form of oppression (Collins, 2000; Combahee, 1977; Crenshaw, 1987; King, 1988), sentiments reflected in the 1863 version of the speech “Ain't I a Woman?”:

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches. Nobody ever helps me into carriages or over mud puddles, And ain't I a woman? Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman?

The excerpt from “Ain't I a Woman?” provided one example of how, as Zora Neal Hurston (2021) wrote, Black women had been positioned as the “mule uh de world” (p. 26). As the

offspring of a male horse and female donkey, mules have been considered tougher and more resilient than horses or donkeys separately. People have continuously used mules as service animals, as beasts of burden whose primary purpose was to carry heavy loads. Similarly, Black women, as martyrs for race *or* gender wars, have often been expected to bear the brunt of oppression while showing up in service to both Black and White communities. This distinct form of racialized sexism has materialized most evidently in domestic work and service industries (Collins, 2000). Under the dominant hegemonic gaze, Black women were best suited for domestic and service-related professions like childcare and education (Collins, 2000). These beliefs become even more problematic when juxtaposed with the 19th and 20th-century challenges surrounding the professionalization of teaching (Ingersoll, 2018; Labaree, 1992). The 20th century marked the beginning of teaching as “prototypical women’s work,” as the expectations of teachers became congruent with notions of maternity and caregiving (Labaree, 1992). Furthermore, the perceived lack of professional training required to be a teacher positioned the role as a semi-profession and worked to delegitimize the field further (Labaree, 1992). Around the same time, lawmakers used exclusionary policies and practices to delineate which bodies could legally and unhamperedly access public institutions. The struggles surrounding the professionalization of teaching and the iconography surrounding large-bodied Black women have contributed to my interest in the particularities of embodiment for BBW educators.

Problem Statement and Purpose of the Study

Many efforts to recruit Black teachers have failed to abate the retention crisis surrounding Black educators (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hill-Jackson, 2017). Black women have continuously occupied a perpetually small percentage of the public P-12 teaching

force, approximately five percent (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020a). Yet, their attrition rates have steadily quadrupled the attrition rates of non-Black teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). In “Why Black Women Teachers Leave and What Can Be Done About It,” Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) wrote that the Black women teachers who voluntarily left the profession cited lack of administrative support and tensions in their collegial relationships as the leading reasons. Fairclough (2007) noted that “whether [Black teachers’] classrooms were in redbrick, Gothic-towered universities or ramshackle schoolhouses of rough-sawn planks,” many Black educators had similar experiences that either pushed them out of the profession or blocked their entry entirely. At the time of this study, the data around Black women educators in higher education practically mirrored the data for P-12 educators. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics revealed that in 2018, Black women comprised just five percent of university faculty and staff– the five percent included full-time professors, adjunct instructors, and student support specialists (NCES, 2020b). I could not find much data about the attrition rate of Black women faculty at universities. Still, I surveyed ten universities’ reports about staff turnover rates and found that attrition rates for Black women faculty have remained low and relatively stable over time.

Much of the extant literature about gender, weight, and body size has used race as an explanatory variable for differences in body aesthetic ideals between women of different racial and ethnic groups (Antin & Hunt, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2018; Reece, 2019). Black women’s embrace of curvier and fuller bodies than non-Black women has been a truism in literature and popular culture. However, bodies marked as curvy–typically full-breasted, thick-hipped, and full-bottomed with relatively small waists–have often benefited from a form of desirability that has eluded bodies categorized as fat-bodies without distinct proportions and high levels of

subcutaneous fat (Mitchell et al., 2018; Purkiss, 2017). The intersectional effects of racism, sexism, and anti-fat bias on the lived experiences of BBWs have remained an under-explored topic; thus, little has been known about BBWs' lived experiences at the intersections of those identities. Furthermore, studies focused on Black women's bodies have been overwhelmingly comparative quantitative studies (Capodilupo & Kim, 2013). Cultural, spatial, and temporal factors have often compounded BBWs' lived experiences, the effects of which would be best analyzed through qualitative methodologies (Capodilupo & Kim, 2013; Himmelstein et al., 2017; Woods-Giscombé, 2010). The present study used participants' accounts of lived experiences to interrogate the particularities of embodiment for BBWs in academic settings. The findings from this study will support efforts to resolve the crisis of recruiting, retaining, and supporting Black women educators (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017) and removing the barriers that minimize the equity and accessibility of institutions for discursive bodies.

Researcher Positionality

My interest in the experiences of BBW educators has remained inextricably tied to my experiences as a big-bodied student, teacher, and researcher. I have developed a sensitivity and interest in centering the lived experiences of BBWs vis-à-vis their perceptions of self, community, and society. My interest in this line of inquiry began when I was an elementary school teacher. There was another BBW on staff whose year had been fraught with challenges. One day, I suppose when the job's weight was too much to bear, the teacher had an emotional breakdown that resulted in her termination and immediate removal from my school's campus. In the wake of the incident, other teachers, administrators, and students retold what had transpired. No matter what version of the story I heard, it seemed as if every person concluded with commentary about the teacher's body and how large-bodied Black people knew better than to act

in specific ways. People in the school used the teacher's race and weight to justify the amount of stress she was expected to endure. Unfortunately, her experience was not unique. The subversive use of race and weight to minimize the significance of issues experienced by big-bodied Black women has become a standard fixture across institutions (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Henneberg, 2018; Shaw, 2005). Based on their bodies, Black women have often been seen as tough aggressors that need less protection and support than non-Black women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Collins, 2000; Strings, 2019).

Somatic Research

During the interviews with my participants, there were times when my body reflexively constricted as it attempted to protect itself from the residual effects of past experiences. There were other times when my body felt burdened by the guilt of my antagonism towards other fat Black bodies. There were even times when my body felt as new and unfamiliar as the stories the participants shared. When conducting phenomenological research, the researchers' attention to the reflexivity of their bodies has provided a focusing technique that has aided in analyzing data, recognizing and mitigating bias, and establishing research relationships (Finlay, 2011). Grosz (1994) noted:

The body is a most peculiar 'thing,' for it is never quite reducible to being merely a thing; nor does it ever quite manage to rise above the status of thing. Thus it is both a thing and a nonthing, an object, but an object which somehow contains or coexists with an interiority, an object able to take itself and others as subjects, a unique kind of object not reducible to other objects. Human bodies, indeed all animate bodies, stretch and extend the notion of physicality that dominates the physical sciences, for animate bodies are objects necessarily different from other objects; they are materialities that are

uncontainable in physicalist terms alone. If bodies are objects or things, they are like no others, for they are centers of perspective, insight, reflection, desire, agency. (p. xi)

My attention to my subjectivity also contributed to my use of an unanticipated analytic tool that recognized my duality as a participant in the study and the researcher.

Definitions and Assumptions

As a BBW conducting research so profoundly connected to my lived experiences and identities, I forced myself to think critically about the language I used and the assumptions I brought to the study. Words like fat, overweight, and obese have often elicited strong feelings and connotations of large bodies. Ellis et al. (2014) found that many women in their study rejected such terms because the women believed that the words implied that they were lazy, unmotivated, and did not care about themselves. The study also indicated that the women thought the terms more accurately described people who weighed upwards of 400 pounds. Within the Black American lexicon, words like “thick,” “phat,” and “plus size” (Hughes, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2018; Patterson-Faye, 2016) emerged as a way for women to reclaim agency over their bodies. I used the term “big-bodied” heuristically to encapsulate those words. Furthermore, I determined using “big-bodied” instead of any other closely related word would give recruitment materials a sense of neutrality and accessibility to a wide range of women (Appendix A). Other essential terms to this study were Black and African American, woman, professionals, and educators (Table 1). In this study, the terms educator and educational professional were used interchangeably and referred to classroom teachers, university professors, instructional assistants, special topics or elective instructors, or anyone else who provided instruction in a formal academic setting.

Table 1*Key Terms and Operational Definitions*

Key Terms	Definitions
Big-bodied	Comparatively larger bodies than what has socially been described as standard, normal, or average.
Black or African American	Often used interchangeably in the U.S, the two words describe people of African ancestry.
Woman	An adult female person (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) whose identifying sex may or may not have been assigned at birth.
Educators	A person who provides instruction, typically in a formal academic setting (Oxford, n.d.).
Professional	(1) Relating to or belonging to a profession. (2) engaged in a specified activity as one's main paid occupation rather than as a pastime (Oxford, n.d.).

This study was born from the assumption that the big Black female body has been oppressed by particular ideologies that have impacted its epistemological and ontological orientations. Examples from the media and popular culture served as the basis for this assumption. I also assumed that because BBWs have had an exaggerated presence in popular culture, study participants would easily be able to reflect on how the tropes surrounding BBWwomanhood have impacted their daily lives. Initially, I neglected to consider how emotionally triggering this topic could be for some women. During the data analysis period, I took extra care to communicate with participants before, during, and after the data collection period in intentional, safe and affirming ways. I have included more details about my research relationships in chapter three.

Nature of the Study

This study had one research question: How do BBW educators describe experiencing the interlocking effects of racialized sexism and anti-fat bias? To answer this question, I used a qualitative research design. Three of the distinguishing features of qualitative research have been (1) the utilization of participants' accounts of lived experiences to understand phenomena of interest; (2) the nonrandom, purposeful selection of participants; and (3) the emergence of new themes and paths of exploration while a study has been in progress (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Historically, interests in particular phenomena have guided qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While this research approach has often had practical implications, its primary purpose has been to understand how participants have constructed knowledge based on their lived experiences. Furthermore, the novelty of my study within research on Black women and the shortage of empirical data on the lived experiences of BBWs warranted an exploratory approach to the research that supported a fair amount of inductive reasoning and was sensitive to high levels of ambiguity.

Phenomenology emerged as both a distinctive school of thought and a qualitative methodology in the 20th century (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016); and it has operated under the assumption that there have always been "essences" to particular lived experiences (Finlay, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yancy, 2014). The task of the phenomenologist has remained the collection of rich data, primarily through semi-structured interviews, that would depict the essential, invariant structures of a phenomenon by analyzing participants' accounts of lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, phenomenological research has operated under two guiding principles (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The first, stay open to the "thing" itself; the second, attend to the sensitivity of the phenomenon (Dahlberg et

al., 2008). A researcher's ability to stay open and sensitive to the phenomenon has remained highly dependent on the instruments used to collect the data. Rather than committing to an immutable protocol, I used an emergent approach to data collection—participants' responses from their first interviews dictated which questions I would ask in subsequent interactions.

Chapter Summaries

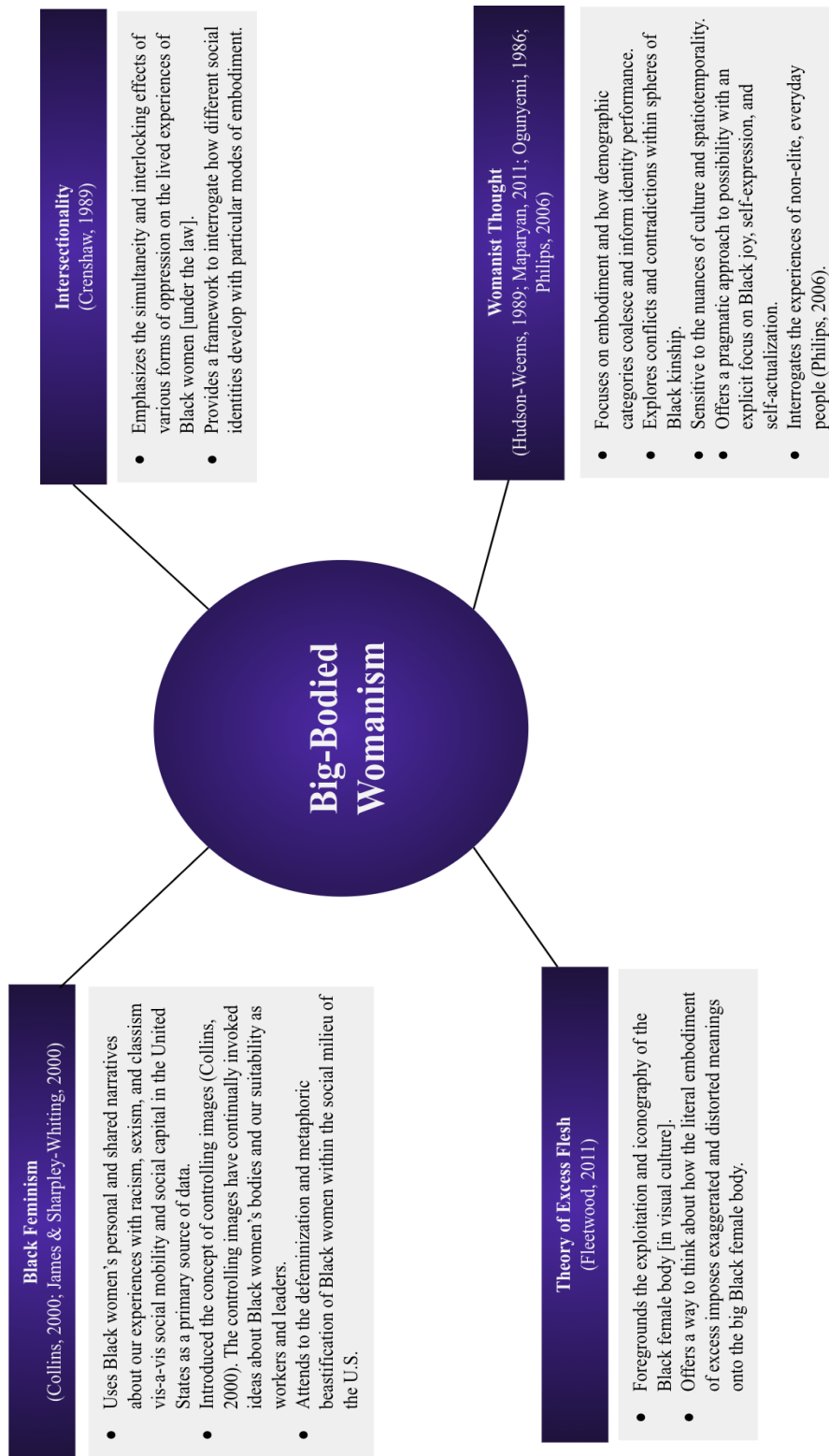
This first chapter identified the focus of the study, the problem to be investigated, and the significance of this line of inquiry to Black feminist and educational discourse. Chapter two provides a review of related literature, and chapter three includes a comprehensive description of the research design, methodology, and procedures for data collection and analysis. Chapter four presents the findings from this study, and chapter five situates the findings in the extant literature and discusses considerations for future research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

Banks-Wallace (2000) noted that Black women's "ability to articulate and aggregate individual expressions of everyday consciousness as a self-defined collective standpoint [has become] key to their survival" (p. 36). The tenets of Black feminism (Collins, 2000; James & Sharpley-Whiting, 2000), womanist thought (Hudson-Weems, 1989; Maparyan, 2011; Ogunyemi, 1985; Philips, 2006), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), and the theory of excess flesh (Fleetwood, 2011) guided every aspect of this study. The ideas embedded in these theories and frameworks laid the foundation for what I have coined as Big-bodied womanism. Big-bodied womanism regards BBWs' perspectives vis-à-vis racial, gendered, and weight-based oppression as central to the development of new knowledge. It also provides a hermeneutic method of inquiry for analyzing the experiences of BBWs across various institutions (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Theoretical Foundations



Black Feminism

Many of the Black feminist tradition ideas have coalesced around identity, community, and citizenship (Collins, 2000; James & Sharpley-Whiting, 2000). Black feminism has regarded Black women's accounts of their lived experiences vis-à-vis racial and gender oppression as central to knowledge development (Collins, 2000; James & Sharpley-Whiting, 2000). Since its inception, Black feminism has provided a philosophical method of inquiry for analyzing the experiences of Black women and their communities, with the ultimate goal being the eradication of those systems of oppression (James & Sharpley-Whiting, 2000). The progenitors of Black feminism understood that, if Black women were liberated, it would mean that everyone else would be, too, because Black women's liberation would prompt the destruction of all the systems of oppression (Combahee, 1977; James & Sharpley-Whiting, 2000).

In her seminal text, *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins (2000) introduced the concept of controlling images of Black femininity. These images were central to the construction and maintenance of White domination and capitalism and contributed to a unique form of racialized sexism for Black women. Collins noted that images of the mammy, matriarch, welfare mother, welfare queen, and jezebel had all invoked ideas about Black women's bodies vis-à-vis their suitability as workers and leaders (Collins, 2020). The original controlling images have evolved into updated social identities within the public consciousness, such as the Black lady and strong Black woman (Collins, 2000; Henneberg, 2018; Weiss et al., 2020; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). The mammy, matriarch, and strong Black woman images were most relevant to this study. Whether implied or explicitly stated, corpulence and large physiques have been linked to these images (Table 2).

Table 2*Black Women, Controlling Images, and Weight*

Controlling Image	Descriptions & Connection to Weight
Mammy	<p>Large-bodied, asexual, physically domineering but dutifully submissive to White families (Collins, 2000; Sewell, 2012).</p> <p>“... broad shoulders, strong arms, and firmly planted large feet to support a wide stance... the husky, mannish African American woman” (Morgan, 1995, p. 93).</p> <p>“Her fatness signals an infinite reserve of maternal dedication, suggesting an inability of Black women to be oppressed since their supply of strength, love and other emotional reserves can never be depleted” (Shaw, 2005, p. 116).</p>
Matriarch	<p>Mannish, not feminine, emasculating, strong, the figurehead of the Black family structure (Collins, 2000).</p> <p>“...boisterous, big-bosomed... a powerfully built woman, she weighed close to three hundred pounds” (Bogle, 2001, p. 82).</p>
Strong Black Woman	<p>Mentally tough, professional, motivated, “make a way out of no way” mindset, unemotional, a mash-up of the mammy and matriarch tropes. (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Collins, 2000; Watson & Hunter, 2016; Woods-Giscombé, 2010).</p> <p>“... the strong Black woman discourse is upheld both within and outside of the Black community... From a symbolic approach to the body and weight, we may view some overweight and obese Black women as literally carrying the weight of the world on their bodies” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003, p.115).</p>

Womanist Thought

Whereas Black feminism has remained central to recognizing and confronting various forms of oppression, womanist thought has attended to the “metaphysical architecture” of being Black women and provided a hermeneutical approach to understanding Black women’s particular modes of embodiment (Maparyan, 2011, p. xi). Citing the work of Kelly Brown Douglas, Maparyan (2011) wrote that “womanists esteemed the body as a vessel of divine

revelation” (pp. 52-53) and have sought to establish harmony and coordination between Black women and the material world (Philips, 2006), which further foregrounded womanist thought’s usefulness in understanding the particularities of embodiment for BBWs.

While both Black feminist and womanist scholarship have acknowledged the effects of intersecting forms of oppression on Black women and other similarly oppressed groups, womanist scholars have suggested that what separated them from feminists, whether Black or otherwise, was (1) their pragmatic approach to possibility that included explicit foci on Black joy, self-expression and actualization, culture and communitarianism; and (2) their focus on the specific forms of consciousness Black women developed through the convergence of social identities beyond just race and gender (Maparyan, 2011; Ogunyemi, 1985; Philips, 2006). Scholar Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1985) wrote, “along with her consciousness of sexual issues, [the Black woman] must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations into her philosophy” (p. 21). Ogunyemi’s words pointed to the eventually shared contours between womanist thought and intersectionality.

Intersectionality

Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced *intersectionality* to feminine discourse in the latter part of the 1980s. Intersectionality emphasized the interlocking effects of race and sex on Black women’s disparate treatment under the law, compared to Black men and White women (Dill & Kohlman, 2012; Hancock, 2016). Before intersectional scholarship, scholars often folded the experiences of Black women into research on either Black men *or* White women. Still, as Crenshaw (1989) noted, racism and sexism so heavily impacted black women’s experiences that any analysis that did not account for both was insufficient. As intersectional studies have grown in popularity and scope, scholars have posited that race *and* gender *and* ethnicity *and* class, and a

host of other categories have often converged to create social identities that experienced specific forms of oppression (Reece, 2019).

Theory of Excess Flesh

Fleetwood's (2017) theory of excess flesh provided me with a dialectical approach to interrogating the iconography of the historically aberrant Black female body. Excess flesh foregrounds the Black female body's legacy of excess within the dominant White imaginary and attempts to make sense of perceptions of excess as a totalizing phenomenon. Fleetwood wrote, "excess flesh is an enactment of visibility that seizes upon the scopic desire to discipline the Black female body through a normative gaze that anticipates its rehearsed performance of objectification" (p. 112). Additionally, the framework helped me think about the reception of both BBWs' literal and weighted embodiment of excess.

Fleetwood acknowledged that a significant limitation of excess flesh had been its lack of usability outside of artistic and visual studies. I responded with Oscar Wilde's famous quote, "life imitates art far more than art imitates life" (1891, n.p.). Taken together, Black feminism, womanism, intersectionality, and excess flesh guided my selection and review of literature, the research procedures, and data analysis methods for this study.

Literature Review

In 2016, Erin Cameron and Constance Russell issued a "Fat Pedagogy Manifesto" that decreed:

We are marinated in a culture rife with weight-based oppression. Fat or thin or somewhere in between, all of us are impacted by it in one way or another. Some of us feel the effects more keenly. However, an intersectional analysis can help clarify how various oppressions interact in complex ways. Fat pedagogy can and

ought to help make weight bias, fatphobia, and fat hatred, in all their complexity, more visible. (p. 120)

Unfortunately, fat studies have remained overwhelmingly White (Pausé & Taylor, 2021). Critics both from within and outside of fat studies have argued that failing to systematically interrogate the intersection of multiple devalued social identities and the effects of those intersections on the lived experiences of non-White people has remained one of the most significant shortcomings of fat studies as a catalyst for social justice and equity (Himmelstein et al., 2017). Much of the extant literature about larger bodies have suggested that Black women possess less internalized fat stigma (Ellis et al., 2014; Hughes, 2021; van Amsterdam, 2013), which has contributed to a shortage of scholarship about the lived experiences of BBWs. The absence of BBWs' perspectives from most of the scholarship within fat studies and the alternative routes through which Black women have had to engage in public discourse about various issues were a limitation of the literature review.

I began the literature review process by entering the search phrases “Black women *or* African American Women” and “fatphobia *or* weight discrimination *or* weight bias” into the EBSCOhost database. The initial search yielded 591 results and included a significant amount of literature on pregnancy and infantile birthweight. I searched a second time and excluded the terms “birth weight *or* birth size *or* fetal weight,” which reduced the number of results by nearly 200. Still, much of the literature returned included medical studies about obesity and the health habits of women from different racial and ethnic groups. Since I was most interested in BBWs' accounts of their lived experiences, I included additional search terms to narrow the results (Table 3).

Table 3*Search Terms and Search Term Combinations*

Primary Search Terms	Secondary Search Terms	Tertiary Search Terms	Quaternary Search Terms	Excluded Search Terms
Black Women <i>or</i> African American Women	Fatphobia <i>or</i> weight discrimination <i>or</i> weight bias	Qualitative Research <i>or</i> Qualitative Study <i>or</i> Qualitative Interview Fat Studies	Self-Perception <i>or</i> Self-Concept <i>or</i> Self-Esteem Teachers <i>or</i> Educators	Birth weight <i>or</i> birth size <i>or</i> fetal weight

I established the relevance of the results after reading the titles and abstracts of peer-reviewed studies and book chapters published between 1996 and 2021. I based the decision to exclude literature outside the 25-year window on two factors: (1) the classification of overweightness and obesity as epidemics in the 1990s by the CDC; and (2) the assumption that literature about bodies published outside of the past 25 years would have been influenced by different aesthetic values (Howard, 2018). Ultimately, I included studies that met the following criteria in this review:

- The study examined Black women and weight through a sociocultural perspective.
- The study participants identified as Black and African American women at least 18 years old (I excluded some studies with 18- and 19-year-old women because those studies were longitudinal and followed participants from adolescence to early adulthood).
- The study occurred in the U.S.
- The study was either a qualitative or mixed-methods study with original qualitative data from BBWs.

The decision to prioritize studies with qualitative data was based on the desire to establish unity between the search results and theoretical framework for this dissertation. Each of the theories that contributed to the development of the guiding framework for this paper has historically regarded subjects' reflections, whether written, verbal, or a combination of the two, as the most novel approach to catalyzing change and re/conceptualizing citizenship. Only four studies published within the last 25 years satisfied the search criteria; I consulted the bibliographies of the four most-aligned articles to locate additional studies, a process known as snowball research, but the process did not contribute any further results. I consulted several books from notable fat Black scholars, but none of the books focused on educators or experiences in other professions. However, the insights gleaned from the books helped refine the conceptual framework for this study.

Black Women, Weight, And Body Aesthetics

Capodilupo and Kim (2014) described how Black women reconciled their self-perceptions with the perceptions of both dominant White culture and a Black subculture as a form of psychological negotiation. Participants' interview data suggested that many of the participants felt like they were "drifting between cultures" for work as they "experienced conflicting pressures to accept 'thickness' while also pursuing a thin body type that made them acceptable [to both White and Black cultures]" (p. 38). Capodilupo and Kim noted that participants' interview data tended to be perceptual. The participants oscillated between discussions of how they thought, based on their weight and other observable characteristics, people expected them to perform particular identities and how they, the participants, thought their appearances factored into those perceptions. Similarly, Antin and Hunt analyzed data from 20 interviews with Black and African American women (2013). The pair noted that their

participants' perceptions of their bodies reflected tensions between individual, societal, and cultural attitudes. Antin and Hunt found that heavier Black women often swayed between self-acceptance and body dissatisfaction.

On the one hand, many of their participants appreciated and wanted to keep their "curves"; on the other, the participants discussed wishing to lose weight to be perceived as more attractive and less threatening. None of the participants explicitly defined what it meant to be "more attractive." Still, references to fashion brands that regularly featured female models with slim waists, flat stomachs, and large posteriors suggested that the participants wanted physiques that society considered traditionally more attractive than the ones they had.

Patterson-Faye (2016) wrote that fashion and self-representation have become essential for BBWs as they complicated ideas of the big Black female body and rejected controlling images. Through interviews with participants, Patterson-Faye found that "the idea of concealing (or not concealing) a fat body was as much an act of agency as it is a response to society's dominant cultural scripts" (p. 929). Findings from Patterson-Faye's study also revealed that, while BBBWs used clothing to communicate their conceptualization of themselves to the world, the way the women chose to present themselves publicly was indicative of their perceptions of society's perceptions of them. Patterson-Faye noted her participants used different methods of clothing to "transport the fat Black woman's body between private and public spaces" (p. 936). Similarly, focus group interview data from Rubin et al. (2003) suggested that BBWs used fashion and style to reject negative stereotypes about their bodies. One participant noted:

I'm gonna have to say for [the Black] community, like for us growing up... the

emphasis was not on your body. Like you can see someone who is huge, but as long as they're dressed... [if] you know how to dress, and you know how to wear your clothes, and you know how to present yourself, you're OK. (p. 56)

Still, the participant's response suggested certain shared understandings and rules that BBWs knew to follow to minimize their chances of being ostracized. Though presumably unintentional, the participant's response begged the question of what other individual, cultural, and social factors have determined which big Black female bodies get certain types of treatment and why. None of the reviewed studies broached that question. Still, each of the studies included in this literature review has contributed to a burgeoning understanding of the social significance of the big Black female body. However, more research that attends to the distinctive particularities of BBWomanhood vis-à-vis occupation, social class, geopolitical affiliations, sexual orientation, and other social identities is needed.

Additionally, while the literature established that BBWs had different body aesthetic ideals than non-Black women and thinner-bodied women in general, none of the studies included lived-experiences data that could help explain how the women confronted and negotiated those differences daily. Analyzing participants' accounts of lived events has remained a vital component of understanding human existence at the intersection of various social identities and (re)creating structures that supported their liberation. Phenomenology has allowed researchers to move beyond merely identifying themes in their data to a more robust understanding of how the individual components of things themselves can be reconfigured (or eradicated) to create more empowering ways of people being in the world. Moreover, earnest investigations into the components and contextual factors affecting the fat Black female body will strengthen efforts to recruit, support, and retain Black women educators.

Education After Emancipation

Reconstruction was the period immediately after the American Civil War. During that time, abolitionists and missionaries attempted to acculturate newly-emancipated Africans and help them establish their lives beyond the institution of slavery. However, true freedom and opportunity eluded the formerly-enslaved Africans as various laws, collectively known as Black Codes, were passed and aimed to limit the paid labor opportunities for Black people (Wilkerson, 2020). Teaching other newly emancipated Africans was one of the only jobs available to Black women. Furthermore, the high premium placed on access to White people as an instrument of upward mobility and literacy by formerly-enslaved Africans helped distinguish Black educators as community leaders and "purveyors of enlightenment" (Fairclough, 2007). However, the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* and the en masse removal of Black teachers from the profession due to the desegregation of schools cast Black educators into a professional purgatory. Since *Brown*, the public school teaching force has been composed primarily of young, middle-class, White women (Hill-Jackson, 2017; Nieto, 2003). In 2018 approximately 80 percent of the P-12 public school teaching force was White and non-Hispanic (NCES, 2020a). that same year, nearly 60 percent of students enrolled in public schools were non-White, with most being Hispanic or Latinx (NCES, 2020a).

To abate the cultural mismatch between a majority-White teaching population and a majority-Non-White student population, efforts to increase the number of teachers of color have emerged with a fierce urgency (Haddix, 2017). Some scholars have argued that oppressive ideologies about the function of the Black female body and attempts to exploit Black women's position as preeminent caregivers have undergirded efforts to recruit more Black women educators to work in academic institutions (Haddix, 2017). In interviews with five Black and

African American teachers, Acosta (2019) noted that participants entered the profession with racial and communal uplift goals. However, once in the field, the teachers said their desires to be intellectual giants felt secondary to their colleagues' and administrators' expectations that they, the teachers, served as the helpmates and disciplinarians of their schools. Furthermore, the teachers reported high levels of burnout. Like most studies about the experiences of Black educators in academic institutions, Acosta's study did not include a discussion of how weight and body size have altered and, perhaps, intensified the expectations levied against them.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The literature around the fat Black female body has established that it has been governed by different body aesthetic ideals than that of non-Black female bodies and non-fat bodies. However, minimal scholarship has gone beyond simply pointing out the differences in body aesthetic ideals. Phenomenology as a methodology has refused to “accept the taken-for-grantedness of ideas and has entailed the perpetual interrogation of our everyday experiences” (Weiss et al., 2020, p. xiii) to understand better how phenomena have been experienced in the individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels. Phenomenology has been described as the most discovery-oriented approach to qualitative research (van Manen, 2016). Phenomenologists have often questioned how spatial, temporal, cultural, and institutional factors have influenced people’s lived experiences and perceptions (Weiss et al., 2020). Furthermore, phenomenology was the most appropriate methodology for this study because phenomenology “draws attention to the multiple ways in which power moves through our bodies and our lives” (Weiss et al., 2020, p. xiv).

But First, A Pilot

In the spring of 2020, I formally began my inquiry into the lived experiences of BBW educators. I conducted a pilot study with three BBW teachers about how dominant ideologies surrounding the fat Black female body had materialized and impacted them. In qualitative research, pilot studies have been a helpful methodological tool to evaluate the appropriateness of the research questions and the effectiveness of the research instruments in collecting the desired data (Kim, 2010). I had six overlapping research questions in the pilot study. I also had one interview protocol with 16 questions that were more categorical than experiential. My pilot study helped refine my study's scope, restructure the interview process, and reorient my planned research tasks within the phenomenological tradition.

The pilot study helped me think more deeply about the recruitment of participants for the more extensive study. The participants in the pilot were all elementary school teachers from the same geographical area and school type. After the pilot study, I decided to recruit BBW educators from various geographical regions, institutional settings, and positional placements within their institutions. I chose to do this not to compare experiences across these lines of difference but rather to calibrate participants' reflections to determine if the themes that emerged from the pilot data applied to more than BBW elementary teachers in the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

After obtaining IRB approval, I shared recruitment flyers through emails with my professional networks and the social networking sites LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. Since this study was about Black women educational professionals, LinkedIn was particularly helpful in reaching participants from the desired professional population. Both Facebook and Instagram

provided pages and specialty groups for Black women educators. I sent messages through both platforms' messaging features to the group moderators and page owners for @blackwomenphds, @blackteachers_educate, @blackteachersconnect, @blackteacherproject, @blkwomenstudies, and Black Girl Doctorate (Appendix B). I asked page hosts and group moderators to disable comments on the posts and direct all inquiries to me to protect the identities of possible participants. I sent out the second round of recruitment emails and posts two weeks after the initial distribution.

Interested participants were asked to complete a participant eligibility survey and a consent form (Appendix C). The participant eligibility form asked interested persons to confirm that they satisfied the following criteria: (1) identified as a BBW and (2) lived or worked as an educator in the U.S. The form also included questions about participant availability and any accommodations they may have required during the interview process. I stored all participant forms and data in REDCap, a university-approved web application for managing online databases.

The recruitment period lasted for five weeks, and in the end, 48 potential participants had completed at least one of the participant forms. However, submissions that did not include completed copies of both the consent and eligibility form were discarded, resulting in 40 possible participants. I then mined the remaining participant forms and further discarded entries from people who were close friends or family members. Those individuals and others who did not meet the participant qualifications received notice via email that they had not been selected to continue with the study (Appendix D). I sorted the remaining 32 potential participants into homogenous groups based on roles and institution type. As I reviewed the participant submissions, I noticed significantly more participants who worked in higher education than in

P-12 settings, so I submitted an IRB amendment to use purposive sampling rather than random selection, as I had previously planned. If I had continued with my random selection plan, it was likely that I would end up with a final participant pool dominated by Black women educators in higher education. I was interested in the experiences of Black women educators from prekindergarten through higher education, so I turned to purposive sampling to ensure a heterogeneous representation of the population of interest (Maxwell, 2012).

After choosing what I thought would be the final sample, I sorted the participants a second time based on their geographic region in the U.S. Ultimately, 11 participants were selected. The sample was composed of elementary school teachers and one administrator, secondary and special education teachers, and university faculty and staff. I contacted the 11 participants by email to let them know they had been selected to move on to the next part of the study and that they could begin scheduling interviews. Six of the 11 participants responded and elected to continue in the study. To no avail, I sent a second email a week later to the other five participants that had not answered. One of the six participants who initially decided to proceed with the study would later withdraw after her first interview.

Meet The Collaborators

Despite the customary use of the term *participant* in qualitative research, I grappled with how the term seemed to minimize the contribution of these women to the study and the burgeoning body of knowledge. As I shared with the women in my closing remarks during the focus group, they actualized the richness and potential of this study. By far, *collaborator* felt like a much more appropriate title to describe them. Furthermore, the terms *researcher* and *participant* and their relationship to one other felt like it removed me from the research experience in a way that was antithetical to Black feminism and phenomenology. In *The Feeling*

of *What Happens, Body, Emotion, and Making Consciousness* (2000), Damasio used *extended consciousness* to emphasize how individuals' consciousness of their bodies and the world emerged through similar and simultaneous processes. Building on Damasio's work, Horsdal (2011) noted that "extended consciousness extends both to the past and the future at the same time as the awareness of the here and now is present" (p. 37). As a BBW and researcher, awareness of my body-world interconnectedness remained at the forefront of my mind. I became more sensitive to how my ways of being in the research and specific procedures may have prompted participant reactivity. After the first interviews, I made a concerted effort to refer to all interactions as *conversations* to (1) emphasize our shared role in constructing knowledge and (2) reduce any anxiety participants may have experienced in response to the more formal use *interview*. The more comfortable I made the interview process, the more reflective and candid my collaborators seemed to become.

My collaborators hailed from four different regions of the U.S. and formed a spectrum of experiences across institution levels (Table 4). I did not explicitly ask questions about my collaborators' ages, but they each provided that information, the significance of which I have written about in more detail in Chapter 5. My collaborators chose pseudonyms to be referred to in the text to protect their identities.

Table 4*Collaborator Demographics*

Collaborator	Professional Role/ Title	Geographic Location	Age
Belle	University Lecturer	Northeast	40
Hannah	Assistant Professor	Mid-Atlantic	38
Octavia	Elementary Literacy Program Coordinator <i>(past)</i>	Mountain	36
	Research Assistant <i>(present)</i>		
Serena	Youth Enrichment Program Counselor <i>(past)</i>	Midwest	28
	Secondary Creative Writing Teacher <i>(past)</i>		
	Student Affairs Coordinator <i>(present)</i>		
Deborah	Secondary English Language Arts Teacher	Midwest	41

Research Procedures

Semi-structured interviews have become a staple in qualitative research because they have allowed researchers to pursue new research angles from interactions between the researcher and their participants (Brinkmann, 2014). Additionally, the semi-structured interview has supported researcher-participant relationships by allowing both parties to be co-constructors of knowledge and meaning (Brinkmann, 2014) and engage in dialogue that could advance theory. The collaborators participated in two rounds of semi-structured interviews and one focus group

discussion within eight weeks. The individual interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes, and the focus group lasted about two and a half hours. I have included the interview and focus group protocols in Appendix E.

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic and the geographical distance between the collaborators and me, I conducted each interview on Zoom. I used the platform's internal features to capture audio recordings of the interviews; the recordings were later manually transcribed as part of the data analysis process. I sent copies of the individual interview transcripts to my collaborators within three days of their first and second interviews, and I asked them to review the transcripts for accuracy. None of the collaborators provided feedback about their transcripts' accuracy or potential lack thereof. Each time I sent the collaborators' transcripts, I asked them to complete an optional post-interview reflection within ten days of receiving the emails. The post-interview reflections allowed collaborators to express any additional thoughts they may have had after their interviews or after reading their transcripts and provide feedback about their experiences during the interviews. Hannah, Deborah, Belle, and Octavia submitted at least one post-interview reflection. Overwhelmingly, the content of the post-interview reflections were statements of gratitude to me for conducting the study (Table 5).

Table 5*Collaborators' Written Reflections*

Excerpts from Collaborators' Written Reflections

This study is so important in shining a light on BBW educators and the matters associated with being in a bigger body. No one ever seems to want to hear what Black women have to say or what we experience, but this study is pushing against that in a really important way.

I really appreciate the opportunity to talk about such a sensitive but important part of my life.

I had only ever thought about myself as a BBW in isolation. Besides comedic portrayals in the media and the rare role model, it was just me driving the struggle bus alone. This study, especially the focus group, has been really helpful to hear validation and experiences that are similar to or expanded on my own experiences.

I realize I never thought about or in some cases even talked about the experiences I have shared. It is a good feeling to be able to share and be heard and validated. Thank you for this opportunity to reflect and think about this part of my life.

As noted in Chapter 1, protocol and procedure development for this study were emergent processes. Per IRB guidelines, I drafted tentative questions for the second round of interviews and the focus group discussion; however, I noted that the questions were subject to change based on the data collected and analyzed between rounds of interviews. As I prepared for subsequent interviews with each collaborator, I relied on their reflections and the emergent themes across transcripts to draft or, in some cases, revise the questions (Figure 2). Throughout the data collection period, I used a journal to record my thoughts and questions as they emerged, so some questions were handwritten and were not included in the digital copies of the protocols.

Figure 2

Emergent Protocol Questions

The screenshot displays seven emergent protocol questions in a mobile application interface. Each question is contained within a light gray card. At the top of each card is a circular profile icon with the letter 'K', the name 'Kendra Johnson', and a timestamp. To the right of the question text is a blue checkmark and three dots. The questions are as follows:

- Card 1:** Timestamp: 2:50 PM Feb 10. Question: "When did you first realize the distinction between BBWs and 'standard bodied' Black women? When did you first feel it?"
- Card 2:** Timestamp: 2:52 PM Feb 10. Question: "For those of you who were big-bodied students and experienced weight-based oppression or racial or both in schools, what considerations or conversations did you have returning to work as an educator?"
- Card 3:** Timestamp: 2:54 PM Feb 10. Question: "In what ways do your past experiences as a big-bodied student influence your work as an educator? Examples?"
- Card 4:** Timestamp: 2:59 PM Feb 10. Question: "What connections or relationships do you see between the SBW and the ABW and the BBW?"
- Card 5:** Timestamp: 3:00 PM Feb 10. Question: "How do you know when you're being stereotyped? What does it feel like? What happens to your body?"
- Card 6:** Timestamp: 3:05 PM Feb 10. Question: "How do your experiences compare in Black spaces vs. majority non-Black?"
- Card 7:** Timestamp: 1:56 PM Feb 9. Question: "A time when your body felt important in your work? Who or what complicates these experiences?"

1. Based on either the transcripts or the concept map I shared with you, is there anything you would like to revisit from our second round of interviews?

- Based on previous interview data and emergent themes, I will prepare follow-up questions for each participant.]
- Participants will be asked to respond to the concept map, in both high-level reaction ways and through specific questioning based on its actual content].

2. What do you want people to know or understand about being a BBW educator?

These first questions were fairly specific and factual. Now I am going to ask you more open-ended questions. In your responses, try to be as detailed as possible. I ask that you offer specific examples and stories when possible.

3. Can you describe a time when you felt the most seen, supported, or appreciated as a BBW?

4. Tell me about the systems or practices that make you feel most comfortable or supported in your work?

5. Can you tell me about a time in your work when you felt most proud of being a BBW educator?

6. What additional information would you like to provide?

Data Analysis

Eberle (2013) posited that phenomenological analysis has routinely begun before data collection. He referred to the systematic bracketing of assumptions before undertaking research endeavors. Bracketing has taken many forms, ranging from reflexive memoing to critical conversations with advisors, mentors, and colleagues (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021) and has been used to identify preconceptions and prejudices about the topic to be studied (van Manen, 2016). I used both reflexive memoing and critical conversation. For reflexive memoing, I used the guiding questions from Valandra's (2012) pre-research phase to guide my early attempts at bracketing. Valandra's questions included:

- What do I already know about this topic?
- How do I know what I know?
- How have my personal and professional experiences shaped what I know?
- What assumptions, biases, attitudes, and beliefs shape my construction of this idea?

I also frequently asked myself questions about what I hoped to uncover in my research. I wrote eight memos before beginning the data collection process for this study. I have included excerpts from my memos in Table 6.

Table 6

Excerpts From Research Memos

Memo	Excerpt(s)
Memo 1:	How much of my lived experience is getting in the way of this project? [Name redacted] said I need to stay open and curious about what I don't know but how am I supposed to do that? Like for real? Talking to him definitely helped. Maybe I need to talk to more White men... kidding... kinda... but with them being kind of removed from the

	topic, maybe they'll help me think through things a little differently.
Memo 4	I've been really committed to this idea of BBWs and strength. Basically glorifying it. But is what I'm trying to describe really tied to strength though?...Am I masculinizing strength and as a byproduct defeminizing BBWs (myself included) like the [literature] says everybody else has been doing?
Memo 5	I remember a few times growing up, in like high school and probably early undergrad, when I told myself to scale back and not take up too much room. I wasn't real life grown then, thought I was, but I wonder how that shows up in my adult life? Honestly, I feel like it doesn't but it must, right? Like in some way. I'm not writing about those days when my insecurities are running amuck, those are different. Again, I feel like I'm asking myself "what don't I know?" ... but this time about myself.

Ethnophenomenology

In the present study, data collection and analysis were concurrent processes, so I continued to use Valandra's (2012) reflexive questions as a guide (Table 7). In some instances, I modified the questions to fit the particularities of the present study. I noted the modifications in the table. During these stages of the research process, most of my memos were handwritten annotations made on physical copies of interview transcripts.

Table 7

Reflexive Memoing Guiding Questions

Valandra's Reflexive Questions	Johnson's Modifications and Additions (where applicable)
How do I experience myself in relation to the	How do I experience myself in the research,

community from which I would like to invite members to participate in my study?	specifically in the interactions with participants?
What kind of information do study participants share about themselves without solicitation from me?	What does that tell me about their self-agency?
What do study participants share before and after the formal interview/study begins and ends? How did participants' responses after the formal interview influence my interpretations of their stories?	How ethical is it to include relevant data from the pre-and post-interview chats?
How do my social demographics shape my interpretation of the data collected?	
In what ways did my presence influence the participants' responses?	When was I most aware of influencing (verbally or nonverbally) participants' responses?
In what ways am I invested in the study's findings? How does my investment in the study influence my interpretations and presentation of findings?	

Unbeknownst to me at the time, the use of Valandra's guiding questions led me to an unanticipated form of data analysis: the ethnophenomenological analysis. Eberle (2013) encouraged phenomenological researchers to use their reflexive memoing to describe "the subjective experience of the researcher in the field... as an 'instrument' of data generation and collection... the phenomenon is researched not only through interviews with participants but also through a systematic phenomenological analysis of their own personal experiences as co-participants" (p. 15). Additionally, Knoblauch and Schnetter (1999, as cited in Eberle, 2013, p.18) and Hitzler and Honer (as cited in Eberle, 2013) suggested that researchers use their subjective reflections to conduct controlled analyses of the experienced phenomenon related to their participants' experiences. Knoblauch and Schnettler distinguished this analytical approach from phenomenological and ethnographic studies separately by emphasizing that

ethnophenomenology analyzes descriptions of lived events from both researchers and participants to connect them to theoretical notions, both existing and those yet to be developed (as cited in Eberle, 2013, p.18).

Transcription & Coding

After completing the data collection, I used Alsaigh and Coyne's (2021) framework for hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis. Hermeneutic phenomenology intertwines poetic sensibilities with scientific endeavors by foregrounding the relationship between the researcher's interpretations and the stated research findings (Finlay, 2011). Additionally, hermeneutic phenomenologists have argued that all stated research findings have been in some way influenced by the researcher's situatedness and relationship to the topic of study (Finlay, 2011; Suddick et al., 2020). My lived experiences as a BBW educator engendered a closeness to the study necessitated my acknowledgment of that closeness as I attempted to disentangle my particular experiences and interpretations from the phenomenon being studied.

Finlay (2011) compared the task of hermeneutic phenomenology to learning a new dance:

The researcher engages in a solo waltz... moving in and out of [lived] experience and reflection as the researcher engages with multiple meanings emerging from the data.

Different interpretations are tried out, like dance steps. Eventually, the researcher settles on particular meanings revealing possibilities that may excite, inform or point the way to future research. (p. 226)

Although Alsaigh and Coyne (2021) described their framework as a "step-by-step strategy to ensure rigor while maintaining trustworthiness" (p. 1), I often "danced" between the stages of the framework. At times, I took sequential steps forward through the framework's stages as my understanding of the phenomenal totality of being a BBW educator deepened; other times, I took

two steps backward as questions and new possibilities arose from the data (Table 8). Adhering to Alsaigh and Coyne's framework helped me stay close to the data to ensure methodological and theoretical unity. I used Atlas.ti and Google Sheets to organize codes and coding categories.

Table 8

Stages of Hermeneutic Data Analysis

Stage	Summary	Specific Researcher Actions Taken
Immersion	The researcher transcribes interviews as completely and accurately as possible. The researcher then (re)reads transcripts multiple times and (re)listens to interview recordings as necessary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collected auto-generated transcripts from Zoom ● Listened to playbacks of recordings to clean transcripts of errors ● Shared clean transcripts with collaborators for accuracy checks ● Read each transcript a minimum of two times and memoed about significant inflections, pauses, and changes in participants' and researcher's tone and/or demeanors after each interview. Also made notes about my experiences as the researcher-participant and instances where my situatedness complicated my analysis
Understanding	The researcher methodically reads each interview transcript line-by-line and section-by-section. The researcher highlights meaning units (specific words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs) that point to a phenomenon and attend to dynamic shifts and emergent meanings in participants' reflections (the first stage of inductive coding).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Printed each interview transcript and highlighted meaning units ● Made hand-written annotations about the meaning units on each transcript ● Began determining codes and coding categories
Abstraction	The researcher develops tentative coding categories that help thematize participants' lived experiences (the second	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Created a database of coding categories, definitions, and abbreviations (Appendix F) ● Copied meaning units from

stage of inductive coding). The researcher reviews participant interview data to ensure alignment between participant data and coding categories and makes revisions where necessary.

interview transcripts into the database and assigned applicable codes

- Shared coding categories with illustrative quotes and excerpts for peer debriefing and calibration. Revised, added, and deleted coding categories based on peer feedback
- Reread collaborators' interview transcripts. Revised, added, and deleted coding categories.

I used a combination of inductive and deductive coding for this study. I had previously developed 20 coding categories based on the extant literature about BBWs and the data from the pilot study.

Synthesis & Theme Development

The researcher groups similar coding categories and attempts to articulate themes (parts) and sub-themes. The researcher then attempts to relate the themes back to the phenomenal "whole" to expand the meaning of the whole. Additionally, the researcher engages in reflective processes that challenge or complicate their initial themes and revise as necessary.

This has typically been the most iterative and time-consuming stage of the process.

- Developed a color system to organize meaning units with the same codes
- Developed a preliminary list of 10 themes and shared it with peers for feedback (Appendix G). During peer debriefs, I shared my understanding of how the themes illuminated the whole
- Reviewed notes from peer debriefing and collaborator interviews and developed a second set of themes (8). Updated themes with short explanations and blurbs that included explicit statements of researcher interpretations and how each theme seemingly connected to BBW educators' *be-ing*. Engaged in a second round of peer debriefing.
- Reviewed notes from the second round of peer debriefing. Developed a third set of themes (6). Shared themes with collaborators with illustrative quotes and interpretive explanations during focus group discussion
- Made revisions based on

		collaborator feedback (member checking, which resulted in four final themes
<p>Illumination & Illustration of Phenomena</p>	<p>In this stage, the researcher attempts to connect the themes and sub-themes to the extant literature and their theoretical foundation. The researcher uses thick descriptions from participants to substantiate themes. Additionally, the researcher may also attempt to visually represent the phenomenon through a medium of their choosing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mined individual and focus group transcripts for thick descriptions and quotes ● Shared a copy of the study's conceptual framework and guiding questions with the collaborators during the focus group ● Revised the conceptual framework for the present study
<p>Integration & Critique</p>	<p>During this final stage, the researcher organizes the findings and prepares to disseminate them. The researcher also rereads interview transcripts with an eye toward disconfirming evidence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reread interview and focus group transcripts ● Drafted the findings section of the present study and subsequently made revisions based on peer feedback

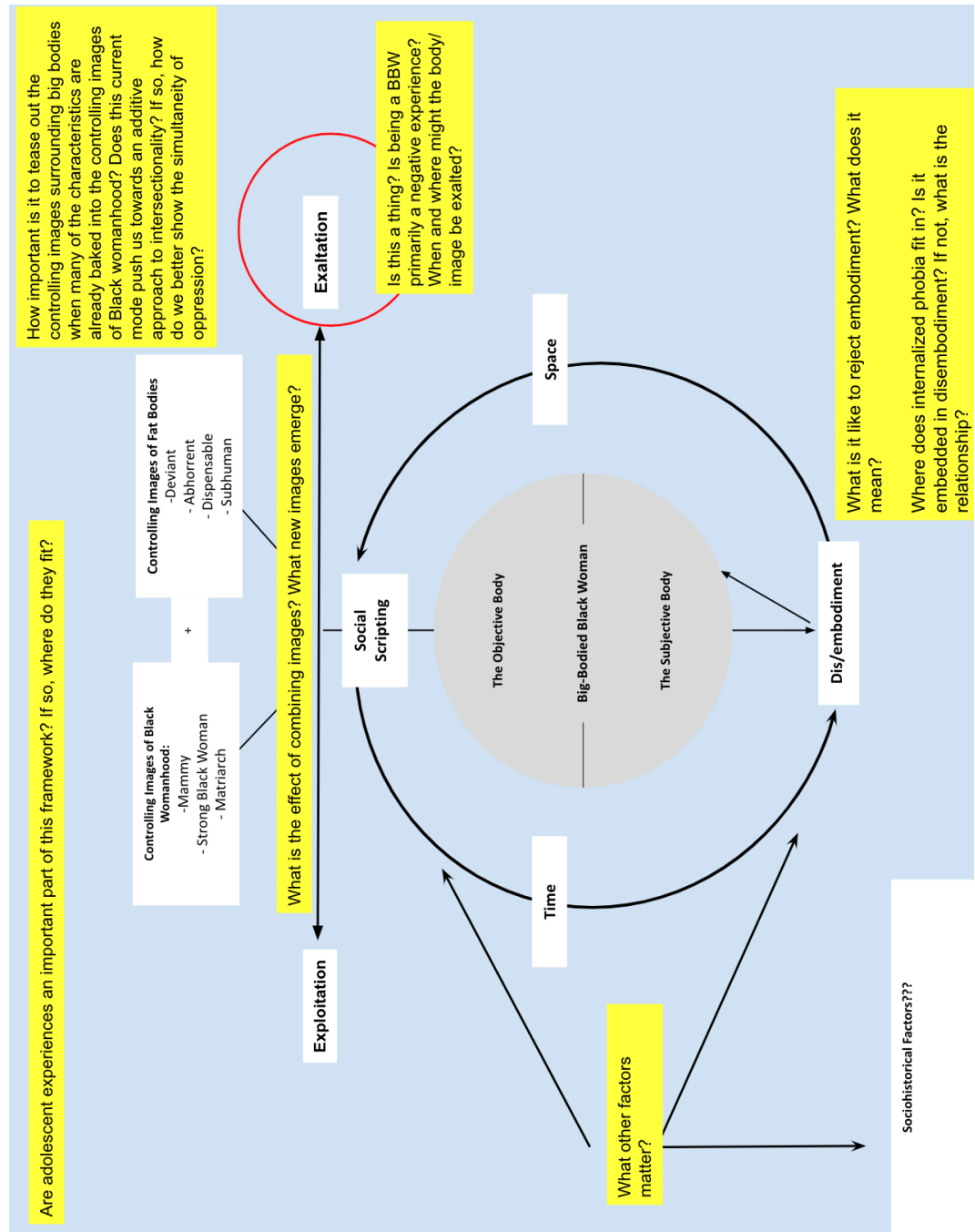
“If You Can Make It Better, You Should”: Member Checking

Member checking in qualitative research has been a way to measure the validity of the reported findings (Birt et al., 2016). Beyond reviewing transcripts for accuracy and completeness, purposeful member checking requires sharing results and themes with participants to ensure resonance with their experiences (Birt et al., 2016). When I sent the email to my collaborators to schedule the focus group discussion, I noted that the purpose was to get their feedback on the conceptual framework and themes I had drafted. I updated the figure to include some of the questions I had grappled with since the individual interviews (Figure 3); those questions, in turn, guided our focus group discussion. Additionally, I encouraged my collaborators to ask questions and push back if there were themes or parts of the model that

lacked clarity. During the focus group, Serena issued the charge that if I could improve the model, I should. Similarly, Hannah and Octavia said the same of the themes.

Figure 3

Conceptual Model Used for Member Checking



The initial conceptual model was based mainly on my interpretation of the extant literature and examples I had seen in popular culture. I used the feedback from my collaborators (Table 9) to more closely align the conceptual model with the phenomenon as my collaborators had experienced it. Most notably, my collaborators posited that the original framework was an oversimplified model of a complex interplay between systems of oppression and their self-agency.

Table 9

Collaborators' Feedback on Proposed Themes and Conceptual Framework

Collaborator Feedback

... mammy is something that can exist in both [the controlling images of Black women and the controlling images of fat bodies]. I feel like there's, if a Venn diagram doesn't encapsulate what you're trying to do, some other mathematical symbol that you can connect these two groups. So like an arrow, an equal sign and another arrow that shows there's a flow between these two boxes, not necessarily equivalent but some sort of relationship.

... this reminds me of the four I's of oppression. So there are concentric circles of institutional, interpersonal, internalized, and some other form of oppression. I think that something similar can be said about this level of embodiment or disembodiment internalized, and then move through those circles.

... I think it's all contextual, based on the position that you're in as an educator, the institution that you're educating at, whether it's a camp or whether it's after school program, higher education or K through 12, the individual cultures at those particular place is, who's talking to you or who's inflicting that harm upon you. Is it an equal, is it a superior? Is it a kid? Or maybe, is it a parent? Are they Black or are they White because that's important. I think based on all of those things, it's super contextual. I think the model can't really be bound to any one type of context, but it has to be useful in different contexts with a bunch of moving pieces.

... exaltation doesn't really help anybody. I'm thinking of the cult of womanhood, where White women were put on a pedestal in their purity. They were defended and protected and it was [seen] as this good thing, but it really was detrimental to White women and Black women and Black men and, and White men. I mean, everybody involved in that whole scenario was negatively affected by putting White women on a pedestal. So, I feel like the exaltation of fat Black women is probably the same thing.

... something about the spectrum doesn't feel right. Spectrums don't take into account situational things or the fact that this shit is constant, right? Spectrums let you slide right and left or up and down, but they don't let you move diagonal. They don't let you move in and out.

Additional Trustworthiness Measures

In addition to memoing and member checking, I frequently sought feedback from the members of my dissertation committee and colleagues, a process known as peer debriefing. Peer debriefing has become a widely used validity-enhancing technique in qualitative research (Janesick, 2015). The process allowed people outside of the research activities to audit my raw data, themes, and conclusions for hidden bias, missing key points, and omitted perspectives. Whereas member checking with my collaborators helped ensure that I remained attentive to the particularities of the embodiment of BBW educators, peer debriefing helped me think more critically about my participants' experiences from a systemic level.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study aimed to interrogate the interlocking effects of racialized sexism and anti-fat bias on the lived experiences of BBW educators. The findings from this study have been organized into four overarching themes: BBW as a particular embodiment of Black womanhood; dominant ideologies and the professional delimitations of BBWs; exaggerated tropes and distorted images of BBW educators; and oppression by design. Most sections are bookended by extended vignettes in order to exemplify how the phenomenon has been experienced by the collaborators.

A Note About Lived Experience Data

Max van Manen (2016) wrote that “phenomenological human science begins in lived experience and eventually turns back to it” (p. 35). The purposeful interrogation of participants' reflexive recollections of episodes provided me with a systematic approach to relating individual experiences to the phenomenal totality of being a BBW educator and understanding how the phenomenon has been experienced at the individual, institutional, and interpersonal levels. My

analysis of the women's lived experiences involved oscillating between multiple horizons of significance to connect my collaborators' various forms of embodiment, their being-in-the-world-as-BBWs, to the essential structures and agents of the systems that have engendered those modes of embodiment.

A Particular Embodiment of Black Womanhood

Serena's Tale: Perceptual Patterns & Particularities

I think [the big Black female body] represents something that they don't recognize as human. I think that fat black bodies are almost the antithesis of human. I identify as a cisgender woman, but I maintain that when you are in a body that is identified as fat, your gender is stripped of you entirely. Your personhood is stripped of you. I feel like when it comes to people in positions of power, particularly in the education system, they see your body as something that needs to be controlled because your body is inherently rebelling against what we recognize as this unspoken White personhood. It's something that makes them very uncomfortable...I'm always kind of advocating for people to see fat bodies as human beings because when you don't see people as human beings, you feel like you can say anything to them. You can do anything to them and they can take it more.

...

I think the first time I truly realized it was when I was working in university housing. It was probably two months into the job. I kind of realized every time I did something or every time I said something, it was taken as so aggressive. When things needed to be brought up in a meeting or amongst other staff members, everybody else got these moments where they would have a one-on-one meeting with the boss in her cozy little office and the issue would be talked about. When it came to me, it was like let's do it all at once. Let's talk to her all at once in a public setting. Let's do it in the basement downstairs. It was always just so much for so little. It wasn't because I was Black because I had two other Black staff members. That's when I realized one of them was White-passing. Not light-skinned, but White-passing. The other, she came from a background where she spoke without ... she didn't speak Black English and she did her styles in a way where she was not explicitly black coded or, I guess, ghetto coded. I recognize that they were also both very skinny and so I think with me just being the biggest person on the staff, but also being the biggest and kind of blackest person on the staff, they just all kind of felt like they could say stuff to me. That's when I realized that everything they was doing was just because they felt like I was taking up too much space. Then it got to a point where it was like okay, if it's not a part of my job, I'm not showing up. I'm not doing the staff bonding events. I'm not doing this and that. Then I got to a point where I was being told that I was causing drama on the staff by not showing up. It's like when I show up, it's a issue, but when I don't show up, it's a issue. That's when I kind of realized my size was kind of impacting the way that they felt like they should communicate with me and do this job with me because they wouldn't do that to no little, skinny girl because they will recognize that's probably a little bit intense. That it is a little bit uncomfortable. I don't get those second thoughts for people to say to themselves "oh, let's think about how we approach this issue because we don't want to make her uncomfortable. We don't want to hurt her feelings". It's like no, we're going to be as harsh as we can because we know we can get away with being as harsh as we can. It's wild when you start to realize all the moments in your life where people could've chose gentleness with you, but they chose not to because of your size and your race and your gender. I don't get those second thoughts.

I began this study with the hypothesis that BBW was a distinctive social identity with particular modes of embodiment. Still, the lack of literature about the socialization of the fat Black female body made it challenging to validate my hypothesis. However, each of the collaborators confirmed my supposition in their interviews and in the focus group. During the focus group, Serena propounded:

I think it is such a specific embodiment of Black womanhood, being fat and being Black, real Black, Black-Black. Black women are already discarded, but even when we're in an all-Black space with other Black women, we still are making distinctions about who's going to be discarded first, right? We're not all equal when we're in a space based on our skin color, our hair texture, down to our body size and our various features. Black women are not a monolith and I think we're at the place where we're starting to realize that. Then also, sometimes just physically how we look, that affords us different privileges and gives us different types of oppressions that we have to navigate in our day-to-day lives.

Octavia and Hannah agreed with Serena's statement. Hannah said, "[weight] becomes an additional marker of identity among us as Black women. People see a Black woman, a *big* Black woman at that, and people start to bring up any assumptions, stereotypes, or whatever that goes along with that. So yeah, that point about not being a monolith is definitely the case." Similarly, Octavia said, "In addition to my race and gender, there's also my body size... that combination comes with different privileges and oppressions." In their interviews, Octavia, Belle, Deborah, and Serena each spoke about how different forms of privilege, most notably classism, colorism, and shapism, have operated within the sphere of BBW womanhood and have contributed to varying experiences between them and other BBWs.

Despite Serena's emphasis on being "*real* [emphasis added] Black" and the added challenges it has presented, the distinction of being "real Black, Black-Black" has often been seen as a form of both power and privilege within the Black community writ large. It has implied a specific ethnocultural affinity and embodiment. Still, in professional contexts, the distinction of being Black-Black has continuously worked against Black women. In "The Black Black Woman and the Black Middle Class," Jeffers (1981) wrote:

The century-old pattern of discrimination against the Black-Black woman by the Black middle class must be brought into the open and analyzed. Blacks have, and rightly so, spent a great deal of time scrutinizing the racist behavior of White Americans. Yet, for some of us, no White man could ever perfect so devastating a blow to the human potential than the Black middle class racism the Black-Black woman has encountered for she is usually regarded by the middle class as too ugly for marriage and unfit for supervisory positions... The professional Black- Black woman is the most victimized psychologically by Black middle class racism. She often suffers from an alienation of self...drifting between two worlds and belonging to neither. (pp. 47-48)

Although Jeffers did not interrogate the significance of weight in the experiences of Black women, my collaborators posited that their comparatively higher body weights than thinner-bodied Black women made their experiences even more peculiar, more pernicious. Furthermore, the collaborators suggested that the particularities of being BBW educators frequently yielded experiential violations that pushed them further away from notions of humanity, femininity, and professionalism. During the focus group, the other present

collaborators agreed with Serena's assertion that her race, weight, and gender set the parameters of oppression:

My body determines how much I'm allowed to get away with things, how much grace I'm given when I'm being told whether something is an accident or intentional, what people are going to believe. I feel like it is almost an integral part of the connections that I'm allowed to make with people, right? Whether that's good or bad. It all gets attributed to my fat Black body in some way.

Hannah, Belle, and Octavia also acknowledged how their weight altered the contours of oppression. Conversely, Deborah often denied the significance of weight in her experiences. She said:

[The oppression I experience] has more to do with me being a Black woman than being a plus-sized Black woman. The reason I say that is because there is this perception that when you're really passionate about something or when you're really good at something, you're aggressive. When I think of being hyper aware, it's about this space where I'm perceived as being aggressive. For me, they see me as like this angry Black woman who just like do too much when really, you're not doing enough. I'm not angry. So I don't ever feel like it's because of my size, I feel like it's because I'm Black.

During both of her interviews, I was admittedly confused by how Deborah seemed to resist the intersectional effects of her race, weight, and gender. While the notions of aggression and the angry Black women have not been exclusive to BBWs, many of her reflections about her experiences of being perceived as aggressive had elements of anti-Black racism *and* anti-fat bias.

For example, during her first interview, when she was talking about the perceptions her colleagues had of her, Deborah stated:

It's connected to like all parts of my identity. Like I'm a person who people assume certain things about. It's always interesting to like, you know, get to know someone past their perception of me because it's always the same conversation. It's always, "Well, I just found you really intimidating at first, real unapproachable, but, you know, like you hella cool". I'm always like, okay. And you know, that has more to do with you than me, but I get it...I think that people assume that I am strong but I think that sometimes that strength is seen as forceful or rude. I think they see it as a weapon and they don't like it. It's threatening. So [people have] ideas about who Black women should be and probably what they should look like and when they cannot reduce me to that it's a problem.

Deborah's dismissal of the intersectional effects of her race, weight, and gender seemed even more peculiar when she would describe examples she had seen of BBW oppression from popular culture that were not drastically different from her lived experiences. In one of her references to the sitcom *The Parkers* (1999-2004), Deborah even said, "you know they treated [Nikki] like that, it was because she was a fat Black woman." In one of her post-interview reflections, Deborah acknowledged feeling a myriad of unpleasant emotions once she reflected on how racialized sexism *and* anti-fat bias had materialized in her lived experiences. She said, "I'm in this state of limbo. Just because something is the truth, right? Should that be hurtful, if that's what it is? Why does [this realization of racialized sexism and anti-fat bias] hurt so much if it's the truth?" I wanted to respond that it was hurtful by design, but I refrained. I interpreted the

truth Deborah spoke about as the observable yet often overlooked pervasiveness of the differential treatment of BBWs. Like Deborah, the other women in this study, myself included, acknowledged that the moments they were uncomfortably aware of the significance and implications of being BBWs engendered a corporealized vulnerability that sometimes made it difficult for them to discuss the particularities of their oppression openly. In her first interview, Serena said:

Honestly, [talking about my experiences as a BBW] makes me a little nervous. I get nervous because I'm like, if I bring this up to this person, are they gonna get it? Like, are they gonna think I'm doing too much or at worst, are they going to violently disagree with me about me.

Additionally, the collaborators acknowledged that contradictory messages about Black women and weight from both Black and White communities made naming the particularities of their embodiment and experienced oppressions. Serena expounded:

Even in the medical field, people to this day still believe we have thicker skin, quite literally, so people treat fat Black bodies as if we're just these punching bags, whether it's literal, whether it's emotional, to the point where they don't see our pain as pain. They don't see the physical or the emotional taunts that we receive as something that's worth intervening for because we have this idea that we're bigger, we're stronger, we can take it, so nothing can hurt us and we're just being extra sensitive if we say otherwise. I've had that told to me explicitly when I was younger. I still see that a lot as an adult.

Serena's sentiments reflected what Townsend Gilkes (2001) described as the conflicted visions of large Black women. On the one hand, she noted:

In spite of the high premium placed on culturally exalted images of White female beauty and the comedic exploitation that surrounds the large black woman, many African-American women know that the most respected physical image of black women, within and outside of the community, is that of the large woman.

(p.183)

On the other hand, Townsend Gilkes acknowledged that the push-pull between exaltation and exploitation made it more difficult to see how BBWs' everyday experiences were shaped and compounded by the convergence of race, weight, and gender.

Hannah's Tale: Size, Social Capital, & Stratification

There's another faculty in our university that is also a bigger Black woman and she had received an award for, I think, being a great teacher mentor. Pretty much everything that everyone said about her, you know, people were saying that she was like a mother to them. She was, you know, someone that they could come to whenever they had problems. I've seen other, you know, smaller-bodied women receive that same recognition, and no one really said that about them, you know? They were viewed as more of that traditional professional, whereas, you know, a bigger woman is, oh, you know, "she was a mother to me" Like I said, compared to smaller women, both Black and White, get to be regular, respected professionals. We, as bigger body Black women, tend to be seen more as a mother type. Things like our research and contributions to the university don't even get recognized. We had a White male professor recently retire in our department, and everyone talked about how his research was innovative, and this, that, and the other. Just recently, I was thinking about if that had been a bigger Black woman, would people have said those things? Or would it have just been more of, she was a mother to me, I could come to her office and cry and have snacks, those types of statements.

Thin Gazes & Professional Delimitations

Belle's Tale: A Commentary on Being Seen

Girl, I don't wear blouses no more. I stopped that shit and dresses, too. I had attended this summit, or whatever the fuck it was. I had went to the summit [with some of my students], and I had gotten dressed and had gotten some new shoes that my ex had bought me [because I was presenting], and I don't get to wear them often. So, I had those on, and I had on a sheath dress. So, you know what a sheath dress does to a flat ass and big titties, what that might look like, right? I had gotten hot [when I was presenting], so I had taken off the blazer part. I remember these three White [male students] from my class were [in my session] and [afterwards] they were like, "If you got your breasts done, why didn't you get your ass done too?" That's where I stopped [wearing dresses], though. See, because every time you teach a class, the students teach you what not to do next time. I had made it this kind of conversation [with my students] where we could discuss pretty much anything. The only thing you

couldn't talk about in my classes, you couldn't use racial epithets. Right? But anything else was open for use because I don't like to minimize people's language. Right? I remember feeling like, "This dress is going out of here," and it did. It did.

When a White man commented on my body in an environment that I did not expect, it's almost like he shifted a power dynamic, and I couldn't get my power back if that makes sense. That made me feel so filthy, like dirty. I don't want to say disgusting because I'm never disgusted with myself. I mean, maybe after a couple of icecreams, but just not because someone has said something to me. Even when I found out my ex was cheating on me, I didn't feel disgusting knowing that he was fucking the community and then coming back home. Right? I can't really explain it. I remember coming home, and I remember telling him, "I feel filthy." So he said, "Just get in the shower." I'm like, "It's not that kind of filthy, asshole." It's almost like [the student] took something from me that made me feel dirty that I couldn't wash off. Normally if a Black man had said that, I'd be like, "Come on. These titties feed the whole community." Right? "But you can't get none. Go back to your mother and get yours." Right? It's all about where it came from. I remember within five minutes, once I regrouped, I was able to come back with something witty that had the class laughing. But I do remember the young Black man that was also there--he was my advisee--and had made a couple of statements to him in my honor and my defense. Right? But it wasn't like, "I'm going to fuck you up," it was more like, "You need to honor her," right? "This is a Black woman you're speaking to. These ain't none of your trash bitches that you like." He didn't say it like that but basically said, "You can talk to White women like that but not her." He could have, and I wouldn't have said a goddamn thing. But it was almost like, "Who the fuck do you think you are?" Right.

Despite acknowledging differential experiences compared to thinner-bodied Black women and, sometimes, the differential treatment from them, my collaborators described experiencing a heightened level of oppression under the dominant gaze. Yancy (2014) defined the gaze as “a structured way of ‘seeing,’ which is mediated by certain racist norms and values. [the Black body’s] being is truncated in its meaning vis-à-vis a superimposed meaning produced through the White imaginary” (p. 51). The experience of being seen under the dominant gaze has exacerbated the paradoxical phenomenon of being simultaneously hyper-visible and invisible for BBWs in education. Octavia, Serena, and Belle all emphasized how--because education has remained so deeply enmeshed in whiteness--they have continuously experienced the most egregious forms of racialized sexism and anti-fat bias in academic institutions. In her first interview, Belle stated:

It's not Black men and Black women, and White women are just inconsequential to me, but, I guess, to an extent, it is the Candace Owens¹ in my classroom that I have to contend with; but, White men, and boy, I don't know why, because really I just want to curse them the fuck out. They're the reason why fucking fat is not valid, because White men have made these notions that skinny is what matters.

In her second interview, Belle continued to critique the history and structure of schooling:

I'm a Black woman and those spaces were made for White men, right? I don't have anything in common with what those spaces were made for because it was for White Protestant men. I'm a Black Baptist woman but I don't play into this notion of Christianity politics and then, on top of that, I have the nerve to be fat.

Similarly, in her first interview, Octavia said, "I definitely don't feel like anybody thought of someone like me being in that [school]. That's from the size perspective, but then also a racial perspective." Typically the phrase *dominant gaze* has been preceded by the word *White*.

However, I intentionally excluded *White* from the term because the gaze can and has been enacted in many settings between members of demographically heterogeneous and homogeneous groups when various power dynamics have come into play (Fleetwood, 2017; Yancy, 2014).

During the focus group, Serena stated:

I would put [the experience of being seen under the dominant gaze] in four separate categories, right? Or almost, maybe six, because I feel based on whether it's a White space or a Black space, every way that I'm treated is going to be different based on the company there via gender. So, if it's an all-woman White space, it's going to be very different than if it's an all-male White space versus if

¹ Candace Owens is conservative, Black author and political pundit well known for her criticism of the Black Lives Matter movement and structural racism.

it's a mixed company White space. The same for a Black space. When I'm with all Black women in a space, it can go either way, right? I feel there's this idea that Black spaces are more accepting of fatness, but in my experience, it really does just depend, right? So sometimes Black spaces, they may say different commentary about your fat body, but sometimes it still comes down to this idea of dehumanizing you, whether it's like overt sexualization, whether it's a Black elder feeling a little too comfortable commenting on your body like, "Whoa, you're pregnant? Or whoa, you've been eating. It's like regardless of the racial demographic I'm around, my body is still a topic of conversation and that makes me feel exposed in some way.

While the collaborators and I did have conversations about the experiences of BBWs in majority-Black spaces versus those in majority-White spaces, because the teaching population in both P-12 and higher education has remained overwhelmingly White (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hill-Jackson, 2017), most of our conversations centered around the latter. During the focus group, Octavia stated:

In the educational setting, with K through 12 being a predominantly White woman space or White female space, and then higher education being a predominantly White male space. I think that shifts the experience of being a big Black woman. Whereas I feel like in the predominantly White woman's space, there's a judgment there of my size and taking up space and this kind of thing. Whereas in the higher education space, I could either be ignored outright. Looked over. Not to say that the opposites can't happen both in either space, but that's my inclination as an experience that I might have or other people like me might have in those settings.

Serena echoed Octavia's sentiments:

Yea, I can *feel* [emphasis added] [White people] looking at me, and it's always weird as hell. A lot of it is from White women. It's in the eyes, right? I feel when they see me, their eyes widen a little bit. I don't know if it's to just take all of me in or if it's to just let me know like, "Oh, I'm very happy that you're here," you know that fake stuff that White girls do. I feel like it's really in the eyes and the eyebrows. Then the fake plaster smile that they keep there that lets me know that whatever they're thinking in their head is related to how uncomfortable my presence is making them. White women are so uncomfortable with my fatness that they overcompensate for that uncomfortableness in even more uncomfortable ways. They be like, "yes, sistergirl, you are just so confident. I *see* you."

Like Belle's vignette at the beginning of this section, Octavia, Hannah, and Deborah explicitly stated that they have often felt inappropriate and out of place due to being seen and feeling exposed. Additionally, each of the five women, individually and collectively, discussed how the experience of being seen created dissonance between how they saw themselves occupying the role of an educator and how other people perceived them in their roles.

Octavia's Tale: Embodied Tensions

[Feeling inappropriate] feels like being very self conscious, like even in this outfit I'm wearing right now, I'm covered as you can see, but my chest still looks really large. So I often try and cover that up with this sweater because I feel like if I was just walking around without being covered, then I'm being inappropriate somehow. That's something that's always been communicated to me. Not explicitly though. I haven't gotten any explicit comments. I know when I was in this elementary school, there was a student in the reading center that I was running. I would try and get on the level of the little kid when I was talking to them but they were literally looking down my shirt. I would often see people, mostly the students looking at my chest when I was trying to talk to them, even if I wasn't bending over. That also happened when I was teaching here [at the university] with one of the undergraduate students. So that makes me feel like a sexual object of some kind or maybe not even sexual, but just an object of some kind to be looked at or something. With younger kids it's definitely less about being a sexual object or, or being sexualized if that's even part of that process, but it's just, I still feel

inappropriate, both for the student, what they're doing and then also whatever I've done. I feel self-conscious and somewhat responsible for that moment of inappropriateness. Like if I had worn something different, this wouldn't have happened. So it's, it's sort of like victim shaming myself.

Exaggerated Tropes and Distorted Images

Serena's Tale: Inherited Identities

I think a lot of people see us as disciplinarians, like people who only need to enforce. I used to not see that, but when I was applying to grad school, and they accepted me, I was talking to the Assistant Dean of admissions within my college, 'cuz I had taken a class with him and he said that he was very, very excited for me to be pursuing grad school. Then he said, um, he said to me that he thought that I would be like a great administrator in K through 12, and he specified a dean. I didn't think anything of it 'cuz I'm just thinking that sounds like a job with money, like okay. So I happen to tell another Black, fat woman in my department she was a little further along than me, and she's also older, so she's kind of like a mentor figure. But I told her, and like she looked me straight in the eye, and she was like, "yeah, he said that 'cuz you a fat Black woman." And I was like, "wait, are you serious?" And she was. It was a Black man who was the Assistant Dean. And like, she was like, "yeah, like he said that to me, he said that to like other fat Black women." I know they think that probably about all Black women, but especially fat Black women. If they're gonna be in education, they either need to teach like babies. Like, you know, almost like a mammy, like kindergartners, preschoolers or that the only positions they would be good in are positions like having to discipline children, like a principal or a dean.

I've never forgot about that. Like I think that that was one of the first examples that I realized that being a fat Black femme in education, people assume that your body is only there to punish others. And I think that that's crazy 'cuz it's like if my body is already punished for just looking the way it does, what makes you think that I would get any sort of gratification in like policing the bodies of children? Cause that's essentially what it is, they think our bodies are made to police others. Like, I gotta emotionally pander to kids. If that's where your heart is at, that's a different story. But like the idea that fat Black people just like have to do that as educators, I gotta let the kids grab all my legs. Don't nobody else let the kids climb on them like that. The sheer idea of being a fat Black femme in education that is not trying to go the discipline route or the administrative route, or who is not trying to work with young children, that alone creates a little too much confusion in people's minds. People are not understanding like why you wouldn't do those positions when being a dean or working with, you know, uh, preschoolers is a perfectly fine option for a fat woman. It's like, oookaaaay. It wasn't until that conversation I had with my fat black classmate where like, she was just telling me, like most fat black women in her experience, if they were teaching like high schoolers, they had to kind of like really, really push for that in their education programs. Like they always had stories of, you know, "I always wanted to teach high schoolers, but my program thought that I'd be a good, like primary school teacher or a good middle school teacher". Like they almost had to fight to convince their ed programs to let them teach high schoolers. And I'm like, why do they not trust us with anyone that is like, you know, psychologically developed? Um, but I think that's a conversation that I can only kind of with other fat Black women 'cuz the skinny kind of like waif or you know, skinnier black women in my department have different experiences of what people think they can do as an educator. For sure.

The women in this study described encountering exaggerated projections of Collins's controlling images (2000), most notably that of the mammy. Within education, the mammy trope has obscured the intellectual capacities of the BBW educators. Notions of the mammy have raised questions about the women's purpose and function in these spaces. Within Black feminist discourse, the presence of the mammy trope vis-à-vis the labor experiences of Black women has remained a standard fixture. Still, Belle noted, "I'm not saying that all Black women don't wear it, but fat Black women especially wear this mammy trope because we look like the mammy."

Interestingly, when I asked the participants how they thought their colleagues, supervisors, and, when applicable, adult students would describe them, none of the women used descriptors that aligned with the mammy image. Instead, they used descriptors such as "intimidating," "tough," "strong," "unapproachable," and "big and scary," common descriptors of the matriarch trope (Collins, 2020). During the focus group, Serena posited:

I feel like portraying us as super tough and strong backfires more often than not, especially with kids, because then that's when you get kids hitting on you and doing stuff to you that they may not even try with another teacher but because it's "Oh, her big ass can take it. She not really human anyway". If other teachers are perpetuating that, that kind of super strong stereotype, their intention may be different from the impact. I can recognize that, but I still feel like that's a form of dehumanization. Then on top of that, big Black women are so defeminized that we are seen as violent and beastly as Black men, which is an issue in itself, right? This idea that particularly Black masculine people, because I don't want to just center men in this, there are Black masculine people of other genders, but Black masculine people are violent; they are perpetrators of crime. They are the harm

doers and can never be harmed, and so fat Black women are so defeminized that they get all that.

I wondered if the collaborators' frequent referencing of the mammy trope was due in part to the greater degree of pervasiveness of the image in popular culture compared to other archetypes or if it pointed to a trichotomy of perceptions that would require further inquiry: BBWs' perceptions of themselves, the perceptions of non-BBWs about BBWs, and BBWs' perceptions of other people's perceptions about them. Nevertheless, there were still explicit instances of being mammified across all collaborator interviews. In her first interview, Hannah shared:

In a work setting, I do often become aware of just the amount of students that will come to me over some stuff that I'm like, "I am not your therapist." I don't even have children. And it always makes me wonder, like, would they— because a lot of my colleagues are White men— I'm like, "Is this something that you would tell Dr. So-and-So, who's also teaching the class, or who you also have classes with?" I often become aware of, you know, would they be [going] to someone else with this information or with these problems? Or are you just coming to me because, A, I'm a woman,; B, I'm a Black woman, and I'm a bigger black woman, and you see me as almost this motherly type of person, that's going to rub your back and tell you that everything's going to be okay?

Each collaborator demonstrated a keen awareness of how dominant ideologies had materialized and compounded their professional identities and experiences. King (1988) defined Black women's understanding of intersecting dominant ideologies as multiple consciousnesses. In addition to naming and describing the tropes and stereotypes surrounding BBWs writ large, most of the collaborators spoke extensively about, as Hannah called it, the "mental gymnastics"

they regularly performed as ways of reclaiming agency over themselves and their identities.

Serena said:

I think for me, it's always like I have to tread this line about like asserting the rights given to me in a slightly like authoritative position, and so I had to get kind of comfortable with that. At first, I thought it was just me being like a woman thing. Then I wondered if I was feeling a way because I was Black in a mostly White space— like am I uncomfortable with power? I realized I had a lot of anxiety and kind of fears about, um, students like reacting violently to me enforcing guidelines or things like that. It got to this point in the semester when students were just really walking over me. Like, you know, we only had five [student affairs meetings with student ambassadors] per semester, and there was one student who only went to one, and she would do like a no-call no-show on the other ones. I would email her like, is everything okay? It just got to a point where, you know, it was very clear that she was doing this because she felt like she could continue to do this and nothing would happen. It was like no middle ground. I was afraid that if I asserted myself too much as a big person, as a fat person, as a fat black woman, that they would feel as though I was too domineering, but I kind of swung the pendulum in the other direction to where I didn't enforce anything at all, trying to like, make myself seem smaller, make myself seem softer and like more, more kind.

Belle described experiencing a similar pendulum-like sensation as she often felt herself oscillating between what she called the fat angry Black woman and the fat jolly Black woman:

I'm a contradiction in myself too, that I even play the jolly role. That pisses me off

that I got to do that but it's like the tension between the two personalities is more, I don't know, it's really a judgment call in that moment on who's going to win out... So it's like that I don't feel like anything's at stake no matter what I do. But I feel like if I go the jolly route, I'm less angry at the end of the day. It's a strategic mechanism. My own form of tap dancing.

Interestingly, Belle and Serena posited that (over)performing particular identities and tropes were decisions they proactively made in anticipation of adversarial treatment. Still, despite efforts to exercise agency over their identities, the collaborators frequently felt like their efforts were futile. Belle said, “That’s because *they* [emphasis added] map the margin. They push us to the margin they want us to sit at. Here I am thinking that I’m giving off strong, Black woman vibes meanwhile, they thinking I’m just a mammy, right?”

Notions of the mammy and matriarch have positioned bigger-bodied Black women as dutiful, often darker-skinned, caregivers in both Black and White communities. Furthermore, the controlling images have forsaken the complexity of Black women. However, not all Black women have experienced the same degree of ideological oppression. Most of the collaborators referenced two controlling images that they felt were unique to BBWomanhood: the angry fat Black woman and the jolly fat Black woman. Belle posited:

Overall Black women are not seen as intellectual, right? I think when you add weight to it and you add these other layers to the identity of being fat, you get put into one of these categories, right? You're either gonna be the fat jolly Black woman or you're the really angry Black woman.

I interpreted the angry fat Black woman and the jolly fat Black woman represented updated and nuanced versions of Collins’s (2000) controlling images by foregrounding the significance of

weight in BBWs' differential experiences. During the interviews, collaborators discussed how colorism from within and outside the Black community had affected the degree of ideological oppression BBWs have experienced. Most of the collaborators described themselves as either light- or medium-Brown-skinned and often compared their experiences with oppression to those of darker-skinned BBWs. In her second interview, Belle stated:

I think the darker her skin is, the worse her experience is. We can't take colorism out of this either. I don't even know how I would hypothesize that because I would think that dark-skinned Black women are the prototype for mummies and matriarchs because of the movies and how dark they make those characters.

In addition to colorism, Deborah, Belle, Serena, and I discussed how shapism had altered their experiences with controlling images and stereotypes. Here, I have used *shapism* to describe a unique form of discrimination based on body shape and proportions. Deborah noted, "I have a shape, no doubt about it. It's carrying about 300 pounds, but you can clearly see I have a shape. One of my girlfriends doesn't, and I think that contributes to some of her problems." Similarly, Serena said:

I would describe myself as a smaller fat. I'm definitely fat; there's no doubt about it. I've been big my whole life, but I am more on the smaller end of the spectrum. Then I also recognize that I benefit from size-ism in the sense that I've had plastic surgery twice, so I've had two BBLs.² I still have a stomach, but because I have a butt and thighs and hips and stuff like that, I just benefit from desirability in that sense.

Throughout this study, I have posited that Black feminism would benefit from more intersectional scholarship that considers nuances and particularities within the nexus of Black

² A surgical procedure that removes fat from one area of the body and injects it into the buttocks.

womanhood. Neglecting to do so will continue to obscure less-obvious forms of oppression. Furthermore, this approach to Black feminist scholarship will foreground the modes of embodiment associated with living in a fat Black female body.

One of the things I remained curious about throughout this study was the mulification of BBWs. Belle's assertion piqued my interest:

[White people] really want you to do all of the things. They expect you to be a matriarch to all the Black [students]. Then you gotta be the mammy to [the White people]. They want you to be the boss, the secretary, the custodial staff, and anything else they need you to be within those moments. So you need to know [their] job, your job, her job, his job, and five people's job somewhere else, just in case we need to consult you on something. If you're fat, then that makes it more difficult for us to squeeze labor out of you. That's why the fat Black body becomes very contentious in these spaces because it's like, "Oh, I can't take from you what I need because you're fat, but Imma try to get as much out of you as I can because you're fat so you must have something extra I can pull out [of] you. Who was it that said Black woman is the White man's mule? I think the more you look like a mule in their mind, the more they want to utilize you in that way.

Whereas other Black feminist scholars have written about the mammification of the professional Black woman (Collins, 2000), I contend that mulification is a more egregious form of objectification and disembodiment. Mulification refers to a corporeal experience that divests BBWs of their humanity and regards them as props at the disposal of dominant groups.

Deborah's Tale: Microaggressive, AF³

*One of my colleagues told one of my [special education] students, "well, you know, if you need some additional, you know, whatever, and you're not really sure, then you can just come ask me if you don't feel comfortable asking your [homeroom] teacher." Now keep in mind he sees her once a week, and he sees me all week. Why would he feel more comfortable with you? So, you know, she was like "*stammering*," and I said, "well, why would he?" And she was like, "no, no, no. Like, cause if you're busy." I said, "everybody's busy, but why would he feel more comfortable with you than me?" And she was like, "no, no, no. I'm just saying, like, you know, if he just doesn't feel comfortable asking you." I was like, "again, you're basically just restating what you said. Why on Earth would a person who spends 60 percent more time with me feel more comfortable asking you a question? What is it about you that you perceive to be more comforting than me?" And she was like, "no, I'm just saying *trails off*." I was like, "what you're suggesting or implying, at least my perception, is that there is a safety around you because you are a soft little White woman and you talked to him like, 'whoa, whoa, whoa, woo, woo, woo.' So let's not use layered language." And so she cried and then told the principal that she felt like I was just beating her up.*

Oppression by Design

Deborah's Tale: Delimited Motility

I keep a student-teacher, always, but two years ago, I had a student teacher, right, and my student teacher was trying to, you know, check in on groups. You know how you go from person to person, you know, walk the room. I will always- I don't like to do it because I just feel like "are they looking at me?" like "am I gonna be able to fit through this small space?" because you can just be like bumping them with your butt and you just don't want to do that. Now, my student teacher was slim, and this is a messed up story, but, sadly enough, I felt better when it happened to her to feel like it just didn't happen to me. So, I would always be bumping through like 'scuse me, 'scuse me, sorry, and they would be like "dang, ok, get your butt off me," and so my student teacher was trying to get through, and she was like "excuse me," and they was like "can you get off me, dang, like you on me" and she ended up tripping. She caught her foot on one of their bookbags, and she literally fell forward, like face forward, and she had to be rushed to the hospital- she got a concussion. Literally, head to the concrete.

I teach in a public high school, but we're on a college campus. We have a wing that has the classrooms that you would have for regular class sections as opposed to an open lecture style. Initially, year one, because this high-school has only existed for three years, we were in the small room, but we successfully argued getting to the bigger rooms. One of the things that I presented was literally my student teacher getting a concussion trying to squeeze through and check student work was that difficult to do in that small room because we have 30 kids per room. There's no room- and in the pandemic, they also had to honor it because we literally, the three feet apart rule couldn't happen. So they did condense our classroom sizes as well as move us to the bigger wing. But I was like, "well shit, at least it ain't just me that can't fit in between these desks." I felt bad for a moment because I was like, I can't believe that gave me some relief, but it did.

³ Shorthand version of the slang term "as fuck". Used as an intensifier, often to qualify an adjective.

Each of the collaborators were keen on foregrounding institutional culpability in the accounts of their lived experiences. In her first interview, Belle noted:

I just never realized, until I started gaining weight, how fatphobic institutions were by the way they construct these seats and the way they force you to kind of fit into them. Everything about these spaces is fatphobic if you really think about it. Policies have victims, and there are policies here around being fat that have victimized me.

Octavia expressed a similar thought during her first interview:

[So much] highlights my weight and size in education spaces. It makes me think about how things were designed for a specific person, usually a White man who's 'healthy-sized' and young of age. Everybody else is just out of luck.

During the focus group, when I asked the collaborators to expound upon the policies, practices, and other factors that they thought most ostracized them as BBW educators, Serena said:

I feel like the actual physical space is always a reminder of who they want there and who they don't. I think that we recognize that pretty easily when it comes to disability, right? If there's a building that doesn't have, for example, any wheelchair ramps or doesn't have an elevator, we know that that building was made without those people in mind. I would extend that understanding to fat Black women as well, if we are supposed to be students, if we are supposed to be TAs, if we are supposed to be professors, if we are supposed to participate fully to the same degree as everyone else in this space, why are the desks made to only fit half of a thigh? Or something like that. I feel like it's a really big indicator of when this place of, I guess cultivating provoking thoughts was made, they did

not think that we would ever be there, nor did they think we would ever have a reason to be there.

The sociohistorical and physical characteristics of academic spaces have contributed to a set of structures and conditions that have delimited the situatedness of the big Black female body. For the collaborators, the sociohistorical and physical aspects of academic spaces have eroded notions of schools as safe spaces. Octavia posited:

One thing I've always had trouble with was this idea that schools and other academic institutions were safe spaces. Even though a lot of us found solace in schools, they've never been safe spaces for us as Black students. We need to start there. But, like we've talked about, the added layers of weight and gender, make us even more unsafe in these spaces. So, when we talk about things and moments that erode the presumed safety of these spaces, it's hard to talk about something that never existed in the first place.

Octavia's assertion that schools have never been safe spaces for Black students (or educators) pointed back to the ideologies and tropes that curtailed the Black female body's *being* in those institutions. Her reflection also further emphasized how structures and ideologies have contributed to an absence of affirming spaces for Black women. The collaborators, both individually and collectively, discussed how the one-size-fits-the-bodies-that-we-want-to-be-here physical characteristics of their institutions limited their access and perceived acceptance in academic spaces. Serena noted that not only did she question her acceptance in spaces but also that of big-bodied students:

I'm [always] thinking about bodies that are bigger than my own, that are bigger than anyone else here. I think admin sometimes sees my solutions as me

making problems when there's none there because fatphobia is so far from their minds, and like, let's be honest. I don't think a lot of people really understand what fatphobia is beyond like, "I think fat people are like ugly," right? Like we don't understand it a lot as an institutional kind of oppression. Like, if we're getting shirts for the entire staff and I'm like, "you're only offering them, you know, extra small to extra large. Why don't you like, see if your supplier can maybe get like some, 2, 3, 4, 5 X's or whatever". And [my supervisors] are like, "well, no, like if somebody wants a bigger size, they'll just come out and let us know." But will they? Like, are you sure of that? I'm like, you're making this so much more complicated than it needs to be by assuming that fat people are going to come in this space and ask for all these accommodations that probably won't be given to them anyway. You're assuming that fat people aren't gonna see this and just walk the other way. Right? Like there's this assumption that the product or the event is gonna be so great that fat people are gonna still wanna come on in despite looking uncomfortable, feeling uncomfortable, you know, things like that.

Sheared (1994) introduced the concept of polyrhythmic realities within womanist and educational discourse. Polyrhythmic realities, as a framework, emphasizes the intersectional effects of race, gender, class, and other cultural factors in the learning environment vis-à-vis individual's lived experiences. The framework provided a way to think about the effects of race, class, and gender on the lived experiences of students and teachers. Sheared wrote, "the womanist perspective seeks to expose the differences and similarities that human beings experience in the classroom as a result of skin color, language, economic status, and personal experiences," (p. 270). Relative to the collaborators' accounts, I interpreted Sheared's use of

classroom metonymically and thought about their experiences with institutional oppression writ large in education. BBWs' race, weight, and gender have been co-constitutive elements of their relationships with academic spaces that have exacerbated notions of their unbelonging.

Immanent Transcendence

Serena's Tale: When Past & Present Collide

I was working for an enrichment program. There was one component where we worked out with the kids because it was done on a college campus. We were working out with the kids at the college campus gym as a part of their enrichment. I had on just a regular T-shirt and workout leggings. At the ankle, only at the ankle, it was a sheer kind of design, like a sheer kind of cutout. I got pulled into the boardroom because I was told that the sheer cutout at my ankle was really inappropriate to wear around really all the kids, but they focused on the boys that I worked with. They were like, "they're young, and they don't know any better, and [the boys] seeing that kind of like sheer cutout at your ankle is just really distracting. We want to protect you and all of this other stuff."

The whole time, I was just standing there dumbfounded and looking at my skinny coworkers that were wearing shorts, that were wearing tank tops, because it was 90 degrees and we're at the gym. I was the most covered up, and they pulled me over because of my ankle. The two people who talked to me, they were both Black administrators. They were also both fat and so I was very confused. I was like, is this your self-hatred coming out on me? They didn't talk to any of the other coworkers because I'm nosy. I asked. I said, "Did anybody else get pulled aside kind of about their attire?" They said no. I believe in the power of the tongue, and we got to tell these experiences, so at the very least, can't nobody say they weren't aware. I told them. I said, "I think because I'm bigger, they pulled me over and said that the cutout at my ankle was inappropriate." The staff kind of had my back. They were all kind of like, "What? That doesn't make any sense. We're all wearing less than you, etc., etc." They didn't pull nobody else aside. It just made me feel as though the things I thought I would be able to do with kids, just basic engagement with kids, I would not be able to do because all of this talk about my body and things like that. Now that I've worked in education and I've had more experiences, kids say a lot of crazy things, but kids have yet to say anything deliberately rude about the size of my body. It's always been administrators. Now when I navigate a space in education, I'm not afraid to work with the kids. I don't have that fear on me anymore, but I have that fear of going into traditional K-12 school systems and working with teachers and administrators and the like. I think because of that negative experience, as well as other ones. I now don't work exclusively in K to 12. If I do, it's like a after-school program.

During their interviews Belle, Deborah, Octavia, and Serena each spoke about how their experiences as BBW educators were often profoundly similar to their experiences as big-bodied students. Serena shared:

It starts off when we're young and we're in the [Black] church, all the elders in

the church would tell us we had to behave a certain way or we needed to have our skirts touch a certain level at our ankles because our thighs and our calves were big. Then we got it at school. Then we get all the way to being working professionals and we see it replicated there.

Similarly, Octavia shared:

I feel if you're in junior high or high school, and you're a bigger bodied person, namely a bigger Black woman, and you have difficulty feeling comfortable in your seats, whether that's in the classroom or in the gym, or in the theater hall, whatever the case is, then that's going to carry on with you as you move throughout the rest of the world and through time. So if you had that negative experience in junior high and then you go back to being an educator later on down the line, that's going to resonate with you, even if you don't have to sit in those desks, just seeing those desks. I do think it can carry if you have those experiences younger into your more present age.

In his writings, Heidegger (1993) challenged the idea of merely resonating or remembering events as things from a distant past. He wrote, “[remembering] is not a mere experience inside the person’s present; rather, it belongs to the essence of our being in relationship with space” (p. 334). Building upon the work of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty (2014) described the sensation as dwelling in an immanent transcendence, where linear notions of time and space have artificially separated “stages of a unique totality” (Merleau-Ponty, p. 122). Immanent transcendence was a byproduct of institutional oppression for the collaborators. Furthermore, the enigmatic transcendence of BBW educators who were big-bodied students

raised more questions about the contextual factors of institutions that reproduce and exacerbate oppression towards the fat Black body.

Context Matters, But Only a Little

The data from this study implied that institutional type (K-12 or higher ed) shifted how and from whom BBW educators experienced the interlocking effects of racialized sexism and anti-fat bias. Deborah, Octavia, and Serena all had experience working in K-12 schools. They noted that within K-12 settings, they were more likely to experience oppression from their colleagues and supervisors and not usually from their students. Serena posited:

I think people don't understand that when you're an educator [in K-12] and you're fat, a lot of the discrimination and a lot of the harshness that you'll receive is going to be probably more so from your coworkers and from administrators than it is from kids. Kids, if they are acting that way, it's because they learned it from adults. A lot of these conversations focus on how are we going to get kids to not be fatphobic to other fat people. I promise you that is not the biggest issue here. It absolutely is not. It is the administrators. It is these principals. It is your coworkers, these teachers. It's sometimes even the school therapist or the HR people before it is ever about these kids. A lot of those administrators and colleagues were probably really mean kids growing up who learned academic jargon and learned how to weaponize that jargon to make it seem like they are not mean anymore, but they still are. They just don't like fat bodies.

Similarly, Deborah noted:

I have seen students will kind of tiptoe around certain things so as not to appear offensive to me. Like, for example, we have like an in-school family. [We] come

together at the end of the day, [we] kind of decompress, [we], you know, sometimes we play games together but it's really just a space to be together. One of my students, we have food on Tuesdays. Like every Tuesday we have study hall and food and whatever. So one of my students was asking for some of another student's food and she was like "you so fa-" and then one of my other students was like "don't say that, don't say that" as if to say it would offend me. She wasn't talking about me but you know, it was almost like don't even say the f-words around Ms. Deborah. I've never said anything to them about, I've never told them not to say anything like that but it was almost like he felt like he was protecting me by telling her not to say that.

By her second interview, Deborah considered how anti-Black racism and anti-fat bias had impacted her interactions with colleagues. Still, she said:

[None of my colleagues] have ever said anything crazy directly to me. I'm sure they've said things about me because I'm not cool with most of them and vice versa, but it's never been to my face because they're not crazy. But if anybody in the school is gonna treat me some kind of way for being a plus-size Black woman, it's going to be them way before it'll ever be the kids. I think it's a respect thing.

Despite their belief that K-12 students writ large were less likely than school staff to inflict racialized anti-fat bias on BBW educators, Serena did not want to disregard adolescent students' capacity to inflict harm; still, she traced students' ability to do so back to other teachers and administrators:

Kids do have the capacity to enact anti-Black and anti-fat behaviors, absolutely but I feel like administrators and colleagues are the center of where they get that from, right? I think specifically about when I was in elementary school,

there was this one teacher who was both fat and Black. Despite her having like stellar performance and all of that, because she was always getting awards for all these things and what her students could do, all the students thought that she was so mean and scary. I never made the connection until I got a little older and I saw her at a grocery store, but it was because the teachers would use her as a punishment. Like, “You're acting up, you're going to go to Ms. So-and-So's class and she's going to handle you. I feel like that was one way that students did enact that on her. They acted like she was mean, like she was crazy, like she was just this super disciplinarian, but they learned that from the administrators and other teachers there. Connecting it to now, when I do work in schools, we see a lot of that still, right? Like the teachers that students just feel are so mean and scary end up being the Black women, the fat Black women. You see a lot of other teachers who are not fat and Black kind of perpetuating that stereotype.

Octavia and Serena were the only two collaborators that had worked in both K-12 and higher education settings. Even before the focus group, the two women described how their ages and the ages of their students were confounding variables that distorted student-instructor dynamics.

Serena noted:

The context of my body does change a little bit with college students, um, not always in a bad way. It just is a little different. I feel like with college students, they have a bigger capacity to cause violence like toward me, and whether they do it or not is a different story. But I think them having that capacity as adults who are not that far in age from me, who can really weaponize and utilize kind of ideas of fatphobia if they wanted to. I think that does change the dynamic versus when I

work with minors. I feel like there's just a sense of innocence where even if things kind of do go left, like rarely I think are kids, um, intending to harm like the educator in the room with them. Even if it does happen, I don't feel like that intentionality is there.

During the focus group, Hannah said that many students entered post-secondary institutions with distorted beliefs about BBW educators, which she also believed students learned from other teachers and administrators:

In higher education, those students that were fed those types of beliefs and attitudes in the K through 12 setting, carry those over; but, now that they're older and maybe start, um, to smell⁴ themselves a little more, they get bold and they start using our weight against us. Our colleagues become less of a problem. They're still a problem, but they hide their hands a bit more.

Similarly, in her first interview, Belle noted:

[With my colleagues at the university level], it's usually micro aggressive. My grandmother passed away in June. When my grandmother died, it was like a real shock to the body. Even though I knew she was going to be passing it still ... I thought I prepared, but yeah, whatever. I had lost a significant amount of weight because I wasn't getting out of bed. I barely was showering like, honestly, and I'm a shower person. But, I lost a significant amount of weight because that's what happens when you're used to eating and then you don't. I went back to work and they were like, "Oh, you lost so much weight. You look great." Meanwhile, my family's like, "Bitch, you sick?" My uncle was like, "You on that shit?" I'm like, "No, I'm sad. I can't eat." He was like, "Oh, okay, because I thought you was on

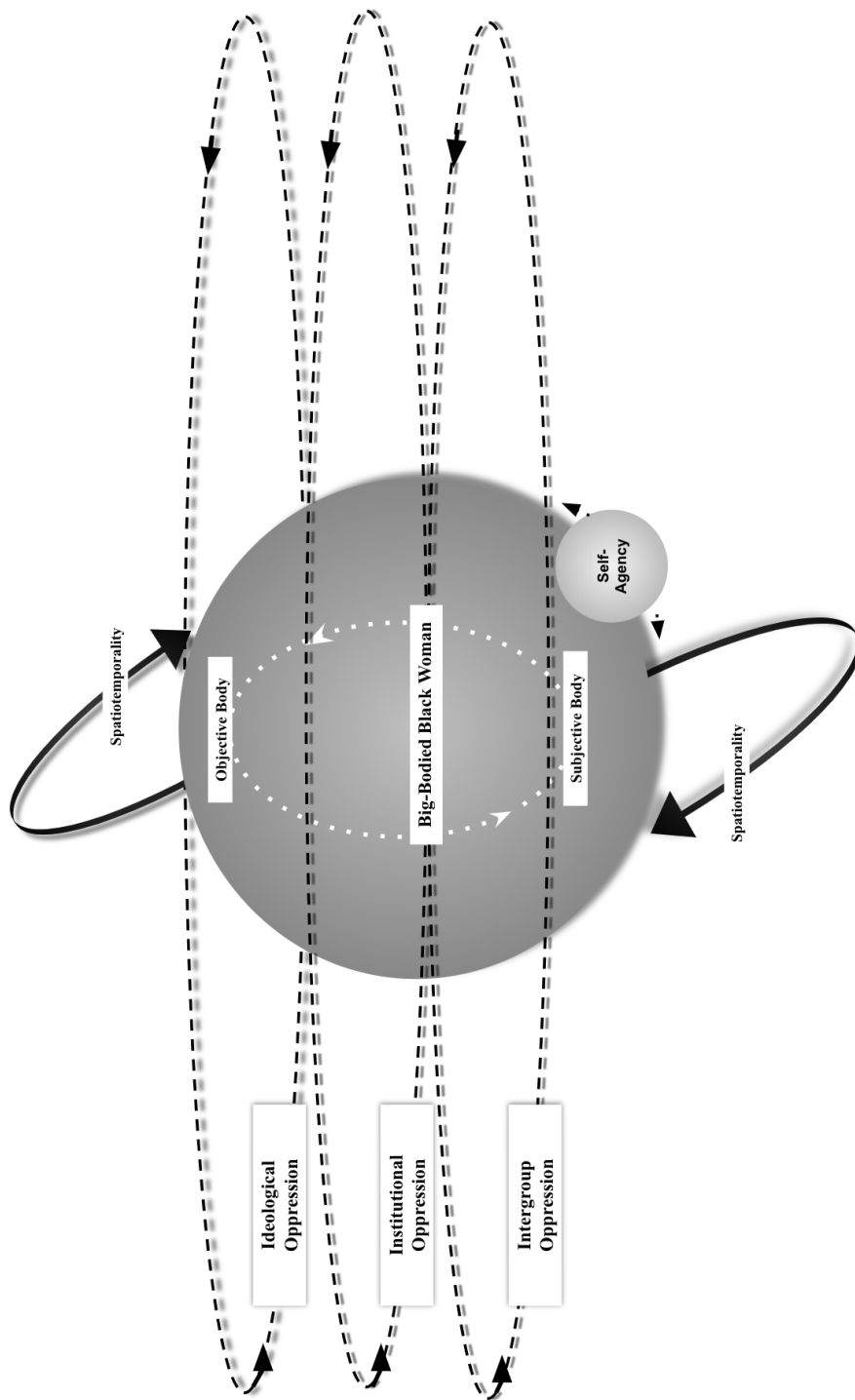
⁴ Acting in a vain or conceited manner

that shit." My family was concerned with my significant weight loss so quickly, and they didn't really associate it with grief but my job was so quick to give me compliments with the weight that I had lost and how good I looked. I started to pay attention a little more around my weight and the comments that come. It's always, "Oh, did you lose weight?" I'm like, "Why are we even talking about my Weight?"

Despite the differences in who enacted racialized sexism and anti-fat bias against the collaborators, the similarities of their experiences were significant in that they pointed to the essential structures in academic spaces that have routinely violated the fat Black female body and fragmented its existence in those spaces. Ideological, institutional, and interpersonal oppressions have individually and collectively saturated the fat Black female body with meanings that have contributed to disjunctures between BBWs' subjective and objective bodies. Alcoff (2020) described disjunctures between a person's subjective bodies as a "dialectical process of self-formation" (p. 271) that has been affected by the settings— both temporally and spatially— wherein a person has been. Figure 4 is my attempt to visually represent the phenomenon of being a BBW as my collaborators have lived it.

Figure 4

Revised Conceptual Framework



A Note About Self-Agency

In each interview, the collaborators described events from their personal lives that helped me understand them and their perspectives better but were not relevant to the study. Nevertheless, the accounts of past experiences helped elucidate how the women navigated their particular situatedness as BBW educators. Although none of my protocol questions explicitly asked about self-agency and how the collaborators resisted the interlocking effects of racialized sexism and anti-fat bias, the collaborators provided examples ranging from embodying and performing particular identities to challenging other people's language and opinions about them in their interviews. Additionally, phenomenological scholarship has established the subjective body as inherently agentic; still, the collaborators felt it was an essential element to emphasize in the framework. As Octavia noted in the focus group, "Something that I want people to understand about big Black women in education is that we exist, and even though we exist with these obstacles and these difficulties that may define how we experience the profession, they don't define us."

In "Womanist Lessons for Reinventing Teaching," Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2005) pushed for the radical unlearning of oppressive ideologies that have delimited the situatedness of Black women educators. Throughout history, Black teachers' embodiment of a unique form of womanhood has been antithetical to notions of *true* womanhood and, as a result, ideas of who and how teachers should be (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Collins, 2000). Nevertheless, Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2005) argued that "attention should be placed on how [different embodiments] of womanhood may offer a critical redefinition of what it is to be a good teacher in a field defined as 'women's work'" (p. 437). Womanist thought is an agentic framework for social change that (re)frames Black women as active members of society that

continuously engage in a dialectical process of self-formation and communal liberation. Additionally, womanist thought makes room for self-actualization, affirmation, joy, and possibility despite experienced oppression (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Philips, 2006).

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the significant findings of this study in response to the research question: How do BBW educators describe experiencing the interlocking effects of racialized sexism and anti-fat bias? The data gathered for this study was consistent with other examples of phenomenological research wherein participants' reflections of lived experiences were essential for developing new knowledge about the particularities of certain phenomena, specifically how race, weight, and gender have coalesced and engendered distinctive modes of embodiment for BBW educators. Still, the novelty of this line of inquiry warrants further exploration. In the following chapter, I include more discussion of the themes presented in this current chapter, address the limitations of this study, and suggest opportunities for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

This study served as a departure from the extant literature about the socialization of the Black female body in that it foregrounded the unique and peculiar form of oppression created at the intersection of racialized sexism and anti-fat bias. The present study elevated the BBW as a distinctive social identity within the nexus of Black womanhood. It highlighted the ideological, institutional, and interpersonal structures that have contributed to a peculiar form of oppression for the big-bodied Black woman. Furthermore, the findings from this study suggested that more research consistent with Black women's intellectual traditions of self-referencing, communal sense-making, and modes of communicating is needed to understand the lived phenomenon of being a BBW, both within and outside of education.

Humanizing Hermeneutics

In *Black Feminist Thought* (2000), Collins noted:

Oppressed groups are frequently placed in the situation of being listened to only if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group. This requirement often changes the meanings of our ideas. (p. vii)

While conducting this study, I often felt the contradictory sensation of using a methodology with terms and concepts that have been largely inaccessible to non-academic audiences to write about the everyday experiences of BBW educators. I am not too proud to admit that I believed using a phenomenological approach would increase the legitimacy of my research on a subconscious level at the onset of this study. To that, I say, to hell with imposter syndrome. My interactions with collaborators not only affirmed me as a BBW and researcher but also the relevance of this inquiry. To reduce the academic- and whitewashing of this study's findings, I deliberately included numerous substantial quotes and stories to highlight what my collaborators had lived and learned. Although I could not emphasize specific collaborator intonations in this manuscript, I made sure to preserve the integrity of the collaborators' speech patterns to highlight the diversity among Black women who, either explicitly or implicitly, employ Black feminism.

In the seminal text *Sister Outsider* (1984), Audre Lorde wrote:

I speak here of poetry as a revelatory distillation of experience, not the sterile word play that, too often, the White fathers distorted the word poetry to mean. For [Black] women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the the quality of light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into

more tangible action. We give a name to those ideas, which are nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt. (pp 36-37).

This study aimed to distill the accounts of BBW educators into the essential structures that have given rise to particular modes of embodiment. By foregrounding the collaborators' voices, I contributed to Black and African American women's long-standing intellectual traditions of self-referencing and storytelling (Banks-Wallace, 2000; Collins, 2000). Furthermore, my use of first-person throughout this study gave me the linguistic freedom to grapple with the shifting contours of my subjectivity. My use of first-person also foregrounded my dual roles as the researcher and a participant in this study. It would have been a grave limitation of this study if I did not methodically analyze my experiences as a BBW vis-à-vis cultural contexts and acknowledge the specific epistemological stances they have produced.

Although Knoblauch and Schnetter developed ethnophenomenology in 1999, it has remained under-utilized within qualitative research, partly due to the residual effects of early post-structuralist critiques about the legitimacy of experience as a source of generalizable knowledge and phenomenology's lack of empiricism (Stoller, 2009). Between the 1960s and 1970s, post-structuralists questioned the impact of people's perceptions of events on understanding events as they *actually* occurred. Despite the subsequent emergence and popularity of critical theories that have foregrounded the perceptions and experiences of people with non-dominant identities, Stoller (2009) posited that the "dismissive attitude of post-structuralist philosophy toward phenomenology" and the subjectivity of perception have continued to invalidate research about lived experiences no matter if it has been explicitly categorized as phenomenological. This attitude towards the subjectivity of perceptual experience has been especially problematic for Black women intellectuals that produce academic

scholarship. Black women's intellectual traditions have been grounded in our perceptions of ourselves vis-à-vis the external, built-world (Collins, 2000; Cottom, 2019; Cox, 2020; Sheared, 1994). Additionally, Black women's use of personal narratives and storytelling has emphasized the limitations of single-axis analyses that obscure specific instances of less-obvious oppressions (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1987). Building on the ideas of the progenitors of Black women scholars and phenomenology, I posit that a BBWomanist approach to phenomenology would provide educators and researchers with a methodical way to attend to the expansive possibilities of research produced for, with, and by Black women.

This study responded to the need for a framework within Black feminism and womanist thought that would attend to the complexities and contradictions surrounding the big Black female body in Black and non-Black communities. BBWomanism puts the literal and figurative embodiment of excess flesh and the concomitant controlling images at the center of analyses focused on the construction of knowledge and the perpetuation of oppressive power structures that account for the particularities of individual and intragroup ontology. Additionally, the framework provides a way to consider historical, spatial, and temporal factors that alter and compound the experiences of BBWs.

Extending Multiple Consciousness

The collaborators in this study were, first and foremost, Black women; still, they were deeply committed to distinguishing BBWs from Black women writ large. Their interest in doing so stemmed from their recognition that the variable *bodyweight* added an extra dimension to their oppression. Throughout their interviews, the collaborators made poignant connections to the work of W.E.B. Du Bois. In his seminal work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (2008), Du Bois introduced the concept of *double consciousness*; he wrote:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,-- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn assunder. (p. 271)

Years later, King (1988) used “multiple consciousnesses” to describe the awareness Black women in the U.S. have had about the detrimental significance of their belonging to multiple oppressed groups. Whereas the modifier *double* in double consciousness has inherently prompted people to consider the interplay between two oppressions, King wrote, “the modifier ‘multiple’ refers not only to several, simultaneous oppressions but also to the multiplicative relationships among them” (p. 47). Despite the relative fluidity of body weight and body size, the collaborators posited that analyses of Black women and their weight should avoid additive approaches to intersectionality and recognize how the three identifiers have coalesced and contributed to nuanced forms of discrimination. During the focus group, Octavia shared:

The thing that comes to mind for me is when you think about the aspects of identity that seem malleable or changeable. With body size, that's something that there is an entire industry dedicated to getting people to think they need to change something about themselves. There's no notion of [you] as you are right now. Whoever you are right now is enough and is worthy and deserving. So I think because that mentality of body size being something that if only you had enough willpower you can take control of or something like that, then people are less accommodating and forgiving of it.

Octavia's sentiments indicated why there has continued to be a shortage of academic and public scholarship on the lived experiences of BBWs.

Du Bois's emphasis on "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" was significant when analyzing the collaborators' experiences of being seen under the dominant gaze, especially when I thought about how dominance has often shifted based on who was present in a space. As some of the collaborators noted, the ways they experienced oppression varied significantly from majority-Black settings to majority-White settings and from majority-female to majority-male settings. The present study did not yield enough data for comparative analysis, so future research could interrogate how BBWs' experiences differ based on those factors. A phenomenological approach would still be the most appropriate since phenomenologists have remained interested in how power moves through and around the body (Weiss et al., 2020). Building on seeing oneself as others see them, another topic for future research could be how BBWs may have internalized racialized sexism and anti-fat bias. Future research could also consider how internalized oppression impacts BBWs' relationships and interactions with other BBWs.

Shifting Contours of Controlling Images

Collins (2000) asserted that shifting cultural, spatial, temporal, and political factors will continue to spark the creation of new and nuanced controlling images that must continuously be interrogated and challenged when they emerge. Collins's note about the spatial and temporal factors pointed to the relationally constructed immanence of the fat Black female body. Extending the work of Collins, Jordan-Zachery (2017) posited that "the Black female body is scripted relative to Whites, Black men, and other Black women," (p. 30). Jordan-Zachery also described how "metascripts" render Black women's bodies as shadow bodies that remain trapped

in a contradictory “second skin of misconception and misrepresentations” (Sanders, 2002, p. 4 in Jordan-Zachery). Society has learned and internalized harmful ideologies about BBWs. It also simultaneously projects stereotypes onto the fat Black female body that directly conflict with one another, without even noticing the contradiction. This contradiction was most evident in Serena’s reflection about her interaction with the Assistant Dean in her graduate program suggesting that the two most appropriate roles for Serena (and her other BBW classmates) in education were the cheerful yet passive mother-maid early childhood teacher or the strict disciplinarian.

Notions of the jolly fat Black woman and the angry Black woman have persisted for many years. The fat jolly Black woman has often been depicted as happy, cheerful, and somewhat simpleminded. Like its predecessor, mammy, the jolly fat Black woman is a yardstick by which Black women are measured because the trope represents the ideal relationship the state would like to have with Black women in spite of the former’s mistreatment of the latter (Collins, 2000). Conversely, the angry Black woman trope has depicted Black women as more aggressive and hostile than non-Black women. However, as the collaborators noted, weight has been an under-explored confounding variable in their experiences.

Furthermore, the fat, angry Black woman has been compounded by a process I conceptualize here as metaphoric beastification. Metaphoric beastification extends Hurston’s assertion that “de nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see” (p. 26). The process of the metaphoric beastification brutalizes the big Black female body and codes it as monstrous and unruly. Metaphoric beastification simultaneously contradicts the accompanying notions of the maternal mammy and matriarch tropes.

Compulsory Thinness

Cameron and Russell (2021) declared that “education feeds fat oppression,” (p. 119). The

authors expounded on their assertion, noting that academic institutions have served as sites of anti-fat indoctrination through curricula, policies, programs, and physical settings that uphold normative body ideals. As a factor of anti-fat discrimination, compulsory thinness is a microaggressive form of institutional discrimination that impedes the physicality and motility of fat bodies. I adapted compulsory thinness from Rich's (1980) concept of compulsory heterosexuality within feminist discourse. Rich's work was integral to understanding how institutions have normalized heterosexuality and forced the idea onto women in subtle and overt ways. Academic institutions have normalized thinness by using and including narrow doorways and aisles, seats and other pieces of furniture molded to smaller bodies, and dress codes. Owens (2012) asserted that "[structures built to accommodate thinner-bodied people] whisper that body types, rather than environments, should change," (p. 294). My collaborators posited that knowing the founders of institutionalized schooling did not build academic institutions with Black or big-bodied people in mind made it difficult to navigate those spaces and propelled them into a constant state of bracing against the institution. Compulsory thinness and its concomitant thinning devices provided me with an analytic tool to consider how academic spaces have attempted to, as Serena said, "make [fat bodies] take up less space, produce less noise."

During my interviews with Serena, Octavia, and Belle, when the conversations turned toward the topic of accommodations and, subsequently (dis)ability status, the collaborators propounded that big-bodiedness should not be conflated with historical notions of disability just because being big-bodied may sometimes (1) impact a person's motility or (2) require different types of furniture or other physical supports. As Serena noted, "[Being fat] *might* [emphasis added] come with some health issues and challenges, but it is not inherently a disability." Additionally, the collaborators shared that they did not want to feel "awkward" or "like they

were causing problems” when they advocated for larger furniture, more space, or extended attire sizing. Such feelings of awkwardness or causing problems reflect the institutional policies and practices within education that have suppressed the challenges and concerns of historically marginalized groups.

Relative to attire, Serena and Octavia were the only collaborators that mentioned dress code in their interviews. Both women indicated that they thought dress codes were a function of compulsory thinness. Octavia stated “I think [strict dress codes] come from not wanting to see Black bodies.” Black girls and women have borne the brunt of stricter dress code policies with their comparatively larger and curvier physiques than their non-Black counterparts (Janee, 2019; Perry, 2020; National Women’s Law Center, 2018). More research is needed to determine if BBWs experience more stringent dress codes and other policies than non-BBWs to determine if the policies have also been a function of compulsory thinness. Still, as Serena suggested, there needs to be an “upheaval of policies [and practices] that [subtly, but adversely] affect fat Black people. There needs to be an avenue in which we can combat that.” I asked Serena to describe what a combative avenue would entail; she responded:

Honestly, I don’t have a specific answer about that. I just think the work of undoing fatphobia [and compulsory thinness], whether it's just socially or systemically, is by changing policies for the workers and what we're allowed to wear and things like what allowances are made for [BBWs].

While the answers to questions about how to create such avenues may elude educators and researchers for quite a while, the following section provides recommendations and suggestions that serve as a starting point for resolution.

Significance of Study

Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) noted that Black women have continuously comprised the largest percentage of the Black teaching population and often express feelings of being “called” to teach specifically, but not exclusively, Black students. Belle noted:

I think somewhere I got the message that I was responsible for the Black folks, right? I watched my grandmother do it, right? It was more so not anything that was communicated to me, but more of something I [had] seen. Right? it was kind of communicated to me in that way, where you have to do something for the community, by community, I mean Black folks specifically. Then there's that whole notion that education is the pathway to prosperity, outside of Jesus. So, education was natural for me.

However, once in the profession, Black women teachers often report feeling like their professional knowledge and expertise were secondary to their colleagues' and supervisors' desires to exploit the women's positions as preeminent caregivers for both Black and non-Black students (Acosta, 2019; Collins, 2000; Haddix, 2017). As a result, Black women teachers leave the profession at exponentially higher rates than Black male teachers and non-Black female teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; NCES, 2021). For somewhat feasible and ethical reasons, no data about the attrition rates of BBW educators exist. Still, as the findings from this study suggest, BBW educators encounter exaggerated tropes and stereotypes compared to non-BBWs. These exaggerations diminish the intellectual capacity of BBW educators. To that end, it is reasonable to infer that the attrition rates of BBW educators would be comparatively higher as well. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) noted that one of the leading contributors to Black female teacher attrition has been burnout, which has stemmed from the

excessive delegation of non-instructional tasks to Black women educators. If educators and researchers are serious about resolving the Black educator retention crisis, society must first and foremost stop exploiting Black women's "motherwit" (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005). Black feminist, womanist, and educational scholars have written about Black women's, specifically educators', strength and orientation toward commonweal and liberation. Still, those attributes do not exist for dominant distortion and commodification (Haddix, 2017). As Serena aptly noted, "[exploiting Black women] keeps [them] from wanting to join [the profession] altogether. If they do come [into the profession] and feel like people are taking advantage of them, they definitely won't stay."

Recommendations

While the primary purpose of this study was to center the voices of BBWs in the development of new knowledge, a secondary objective was to interrogate how schools and other institutions have perpetuated oppressive ideologies and, in some instances, literal harm against hegemonically deviant bodies. In Chapter 1, I acknowledged that qualitative research has not typically been carried out to effect change but rather to understand phenomena better as they have been lived (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Still, my hope has remained steadfast that the findings of this study might contribute to ideological, institutional, and interpersonal shifts that enable the development of more inclusive and affirming spaces for members of communities outside the dominant norm.

Du Bois's double consciousness has remained essential to my understanding of the tension between individualist and ideological oppression. The collaborators who, as noted in Chapter 4, have experienced the disjunctures between their subjective and objective bodies and who have felt the impossibility of reconciliation that Du Bois described have attributed the lack

of resolution to the ways the intersectional effects of racialized sexism and anti-fat bias have been excluded from popular discourse. Serena noted:

[The issues BBW educators face] are not deeply understood, so it's a little harder to really educate people on it and have them take it seriously. I think even the word fatphobia is still hella misunderstood. I feel like in the K-12 space, but also in the higher ed space, despite higher ed really pushing for DEI initiatives, they really still don't have the language or the respect for fat Black women to be able to combat anti-black and anti-fat attitudes. We leave it at, don't laugh at somebody's weight, and don't call people the N-word, and I think that's as far as we've gotten today.

A tertiary purpose of this study was to deepen our understanding of the particular challenges and difficulties BBWs encounter and to push beyond simplistic remedies like not laughing at discursive bodies and not using racial epithets.

The combined effects of race, weight, and gender have contributed to a distinctive form of situatedness for the BBW. However, little scholarship has endeavored to articulate how that situatedness has materialized in the day-to-day lives of BBWs, specifically in their professional experiences. The women in this study discussed how the (un)intentional exclusion of fat-based oppression in analyses of the lived experiences of Black women has served as a mechanism for dismissing their concerns and challenges. Most of the collaborators felt that formal programming about anti-Black fat bias would go the same way as other diversity, equity, and inclusion-style (DEI) training—disintegrating into buzzwords and performative actions—and was not the most immediate course of action. Serena posited:

I don't want it to be institutionalized because I think that'll probably make the problem worse and very performative. It wouldn't get to the root of anything. Honestly, the more

rules you make, the more people are going to find ways to get around those rules. That's why I'm straying away from the word training because I don't think that a training will really get to the heart of what this issue is.

I am of two minds when it comes to Serena's statement. On the one hand, I agree that specific training and workshops about the intersection of racialized sexism and anti-fat bias would feel performative and likely fail to satisfy whatever outcomes may be set. In my experience, some DEI workshops have felt like a cesspool of White guilt, White fragility, and the academic jargon *du jour*. On the other hand, I believe that when workshops are facilitated effectively, they provide a forum for the somewhat widespread dissemination of new knowledge, transformative ideas, and collaborative practices for social change. Still, data from the collaborators' interviews suggested that informal conversations with people in moments of conflict or misrepresentations would be a good start. Serena said:

I just want people to stop acting like they don't see the literal elephant in the room, right? Like y'all really be judging me because of my race and weight. I want the power to be able to call you out. Now, am I going to do it every single time? Probably not. That is a lot. That's a extra job at that point, but I want to be able to call you out. I don't want it to have to go through 17 million people for it to be validated or for you to be told that you, in fact, were wrong. I want to be able to call you out. You listen, and going forward you change it up. It doesn't have to be a super big discourse, like a Fatphobia 101. I don't want it to be institutionalized because I think that'll probably make the problem worse if anything.

Similarly, Belle asserted, "I just want to tell people to shut the fuck up when a fat Black woman is speaking. Listen to her." The women in this study agreed that actively and

intentionally listening to the concerns of BBWs would also push people to (re)evaluate the beliefs they have internalized and projected onto fat Black women.

Media as Public Pedagogy. In 2020, the hashtag #protectBlackwomen gained traction on social media platforms. People used the hashtag to bring awareness to the ways Black women (and girls) had been erased from contemporary social justice and civil rights movements. However, some social media users criticized individuals, organizations, and media outlets for seemingly only supporting the campaign when the Black women in question met specific standards of desirability and respectability. Under an Instagram post that read, “Black womxn are to be respected, protected, honored, & defended or no one will ever be free,” social media user @lyszflo (2022) wrote, “don’t only protect the [B]lack women you find special or attractive. Miss me with the ‘Queen’ if it’s selective.” Under a different post, @arborandwood (2022) wrote, “protect Black women whether they are a nominee for the Supreme Court or the punchline at the end of a cruel joke or a victim of anti-trans violence.” Still, the problem has remained that the comedic exploitation and the historical iconography of big-bodied Black women have caused other people to see them as impervious to pain and in less need of protection.

The media has played an active role in perpetuating, reifying, and internalizing oppressive ideologies toward the big Black female body. Kyrölä (2021) wrote that fat bodies have remained overwhelmingly prevalent in comedies and “so-called trash TV” (p. 105). BBWs have often been depicted as hyperbolic caricatures (Cameron & Russell, 2021; Fleetwood, 2017). The use of oppressive imagery has materialized in the day-to-day lives of BBWs and compounded many of their experiences (Collins, 2000; Fleetwood, 2017). BBWs writ large have pushed for more expansive and humanistic representation in the media beyond the fat best friend,

lazy sidekick, or big scary Black woman (Henry, 2015; Victorian, 2020). A shift in the media representations of BBWs would counteract the long-standing tropes that have truncated the women's being-in-the-world and make room for new possibilities and potentialities.

Make Room. All bodies are situationally and temporarily abled (Kenins, 2017). Therefore, all bodies will require some level of accommodation at some point in their lives. In addition to a lack of affirming educational spaces, many physical spaces have not been accessible for BBW educators. Overcrowded classrooms and "standard-sized" furniture that may or may not be immovable have exacerbated BBW educators' challenges navigating educational spaces. I recognize that some institutional factors like staff shortages, budgetary constraints, and other issues may compound these challenges. Still, institutions would benefit from earnestly asking themselves how they can think more expansively and holistically about notions of access, which bodies can most unhamperedly navigate spaces and participate fully in the accompanying experiences, and how they can remove barriers for the maximum number of people.

Limitations

A significant limitation of this study was my inability to collect observational field data due to (1) the geographical distance between my collaborators and me and (2) the Covid-19 pandemic. Hermeneutic interpretations of experiences are at the core of phenomenological research (Freeman, 2011). Past and present phenomenologists have posited that experiences have been legitimate sources of knowledge. However, van Manen (2016) asserted that because much of phenomenological research has included talking to people about experiences after they have happened, a significant amount of the pre-consciousness of experience gets lost and is, instead, replaced with individuals' interpretations of experiences, which likely include biases and distortions due to memory loss. The collection of observational data would have, perhaps, helped

my collaborators and I calibrate our experiences— their experiences of living the event; mine, observing— and get even closer to the essential structures of the phenomenological experience of being a BBW educator. Unfortunately, none of my collaborators were geographically accessible to me; and, even if we had been in the same area at the time of the study, many of the CDC’s Covid-19 restrictions were still in place, which would have prohibited me from accessing my collaborators’ institutions as a person outside of their communities. Future research about the experiences of BBW educators, phenomenological or otherwise, would benefit from the collection of observational field data.

A second limitation of this study was that the collaborators, though geographically and positionally diverse, were homogeneous in other respects, most notably age and educational attainment. The collaborators were within approximately ten years of age from each other and possessed many of the same attitudes and mindsets about racialized sexism and anti-fat bias. Their similar perspectives were evident in their use of the relatively contemporary word *fatphobia* and their references to the musical artist Lizzo as a BBW role model. Therefore, future research should examine the role age plays in the experiences and perceptions of BBWs. Four of the five collaborators not only worked in higher education but were pursuing or had acquired doctorate degrees. Connected to van Manen’s discussion about individuals’ reflections of their experiences, the collaborators included a significant amount of intellectualizing in their accounts of lived experiences, often using specific terminology. Although I recruited and selected BBW educators with varying educational backgrounds and experiences, I was disheartened that most of the K-12 participants did not continue in the study. The Covid-19 pandemic and its concomitant stressors could have been a reason. A replication of this study in a, hopefully, post-pandemic world may attract and retain participants with greater diversity and, as

a result, expand these findings.

Conclusion

This study illuminated the particular experiences of BBW educators at the intersection of racialized sexism and anti-fat bias. BBWs have existed in a dialectical relationship with the world that has been fraught with controlling images, contradictions, and conflict. Still, the possibility for resolution and the radical reimagining of academic spaces remain. As the findings from this study have suggested, BBWs want to be affirmed and have their experiences validated. Furthermore, BBWs want and deserve to be recognized as active citizens who can exercise self-agency and autonomy over their bodies.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flier



Research Participants Needed

for a study on

Race, Weight, Gender
and the Embodied (odied, odied)
Consciousness of
Big-Bodied Black Women Educators

I am looking to interview big-bodied Black women (BBW) educators as part of a project seeking to understand how race, weight, and gender impact their professional identities and experiences.

Participant Qualifications:

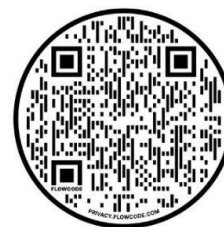
- Self-identified BBBWs (*related terms: plus size, curvy, etc.*)
- Past or current educational professionals (classroom teachers, university teaching faculty, instructional assistants, school administrators, counselors, etc.)
- Must live and work in the United States

Time & Technology Requirements:

- Two (2) 60-90 minute one-on-one interviews. Interview days and times are flexible and will be determined by participants' availability.
- One (1) 60-90 minute focus group interview
- All individual and focus group interviews will be conducted within an eight-week window.
- Access to Zoom

How to sign up?

Use your phone's camera to scan the QR code or enter the URL into your web browser's search bar to complete the Participant Eligibility Survey!



<https://redcap.vcu.edu/surveys/?s=HEFDRAT3DPYDHCJ8>

About the Researcher:



Kendra Johnson is a self-identified BBW and a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. Her research interrogates how race, gender, and class dynamics shape the experiences of Black girls and women in public education. Her research also includes inquiries into how teacher education and professional development programs incorporate the tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy to respond to the unique needs, perspectives, and experiences of Black educators. Kendra is a former elementary school teacher and leader. She currently works in teacher education as a program coordinator and instructor. Kendra received her BA in Journalism from Hampton University, before earning her Ms.Ed in Educational Studies from Johns Hopkins University.

If you have any questions or would like more information about your participation in this study, please contact Kendra via email (johnsonkd3@vcu.edu) or phone at (804) 200-9881.

Appendix B: Recruitment Emails and Content for Social Media Posts

Email to be shared via VCU School of Education Listserv:

Subject: Research Participants Needed

To: School/ Department of Education Representative

Hello, my name is Kendra Johnson and I am a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. As part of my dissertation, I am looking to interview self-identified big-bodied Black women educators as part of a project seeking to understand how race, weight, and gender impact their professional identities and experiences. Please share the following email and attached recruitment materials via your departmental listserv. If you have any questions about the content of the email, please feel free to contact me at johnsonkd3@vcu.edu. If any interested persons contact you for more information, please direct them to contact me via the email address I provided or by phone at (804) 200-9881.

With gratitude,

Kendra Johnson

Follow-Up Email to be shared via University Schools/Departments of Education Listserv (2 weeks later):

Hello, I am writing to ask if you would be willing to share the email and attached recruitment materials via your departmental listserv a second time. If you have any questions about the content of the email, please feel free to contact me at johnsonkd3@vcu.edu. If any interested persons contact you for more information, please direct them to contact me via the email address I provided or by phone at (804) 200-9881.

With gratitude,

Kendra Johnson

Content of Email: My name is Kendra Johnson. I am a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. As a part of my dissertation, I am looking to interview self-identified big-bodied Black women educators (classroom teachers, university teaching faculty, instructional assistants, school administrators, counselors, etc.) as part of a project seeking to understand how race, weight, and gender impact their professional identities and experiences. Within the Black American lexicon, words like “thick”, “phat”, and “plus size” have emerged as a way for women to reclaim agency over their/our bodies. The term “big-bodied”, present throughout and across study materials, is used broadly as a way to encapsulate each of those words. Your voluntary participation in this study would include two rounds of semi-structured interviews and one focus group interview within an eight-week period. Each interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. If you meet the specified participant criteria and are interested in participating, please use the following link

to review the participant information form and complete the participant eligibility survey: <https://redcap.vcu.edu/surveys/?s=HEFDRAT3DPYDHCJ8>

Participant Qualifications:

- Self-identifies as big-bodied Black women;
- Is either a past or current educational professional (P-12 classroom teachers, university teaching faculty, instructional assistants, school administrators, or counselors);
- and, Lives in the United States

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at johnsonkd3@vcu.edu. Thank you for your consideration.

With gratitude,

Kendra Johnson

Email to be shared with colleagues outside of VCU SOE and with whom I have previously had email correspondence:

Subject: Research Participants Needed

Dear colleagues,

Please consider sharing the following message and recruitment materials with your various professional networks. If any interested persons contact you for more information, please direct them to contact me via the email address I provided or by phone at (804) 200-9881.

With gratitude,

Kendra Johnson

Follow-Up Email to be shared with colleagues (2 weeks later):

Hello, I am writing to ask if you would be willing to share the email and attached recruitment materials via your professional networks a second time. If you have any questions about the content of the email, please feel free to contact me at johnsonkd3@vcu.edu. If any interested persons contact you for more information, please direct them to contact me via the email address I provided or by phone at (804) 200-9881.

With gratitude,

Kendra Johnson

Content of Email: *My name is Kendra Johnson. I am a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. As a part of my dissertation, I am looking to interview self-identified big-bodied Black women educators (classroom teachers, university teaching faculty, instructional assistants, school administrators, counselors, etc.) as part of a project seeking to understand how race, weight, and gender impact their professional identities and experiences. Within the Black American lexicon, words like “thick”, “phat”, and “plus size” have emerged as a way for women to reclaim agency over their/our bodies. The term “big-bodied”, present throughout and across study materials, is used broadly as a way to encapsulate each of those words. Your voluntary participation in this study would include two rounds of semi-structured interviews and one focus group interview within an eight-week period. Each interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. If you meet the specified participant criteria and are interested in participating, please use the following link to complete the participant eligibility survey:*
<https://redcap.vcu.edu/surveys/?s=HEFDRAT3DPYDHCJ8>

Participant Qualifications:

- Self-identifies as big-bodied Black women;
- Is either a past or current educational professional (P-12 classroom teachers, university teaching faculty, instructional assistants, school administrators, or counselors);
- and, Lives in the United States

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at johnsonkd3@vcu.edu. Thank you for your consideration.

With gratitude,

Kendra Johnson

Social Media Post (for moderated groups that require permission before posting--Facebook and Instagram):

Hello, my name is Kendra Johnson and I am a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. As part of my dissertation, I am looking to interview self-identified big-bodied Black women educators as part of my project, “Race, Weight, Gender and the Embodied (odied, odied) Consciousness of Big-Bodied Black Women Educators: A Phenomenological Study”. My study seeks to understand how race, weight, and gender impact their professional identities and experiences. Please share the following language and recruitment flyer with your online community. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me through in-app messaging or via email johnsonkd3@vcu.edu. Additionally, please also disable comments on the posts to protect potential participants’ privacy. If any interested persons contact you for more information, please direct them to contact me via the email address I provided or by phone at (804) 200-9881.

Follow-Up Email to be shared via University Schools/Departments of Education

Listserv (2 weeks later):

Hello, I am writing to ask if you would be willing to share the message and attached recruitment materials via your social media community a second time. If you have any questions about the content of the email, please feel free to contact me at johnsonkd3@vcu.edu. Additionally, please also disable comments on the posts to protect potential participants' privacy. If any interested persons contact you for more information, please direct them to contact me via the email address I provided or by phone at (804) 200-9881.

With gratitude,

Kendra Johnson

Social Media Post Content (For LinkedIn, Facebook, & Instagram)-- To be posted twice, 2 weeks apart:

Content of Email: My name is Kendra Johnson. I am a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. As a part of my dissertation, I am looking to interview self-identified big-bodied Black women educators (classroom teachers, university teaching faculty, instructional assistants, school administrators, counselors, etc.) as part of a project seeking to understand how race, weight, and gender impact their professional identities and experiences. Within the Black American lexicon, words like “thick”, “phat”, and “plus size” have emerged as a way for women to reclaim agency over their/our bodies. The term “big-bodied”, present throughout and across study materials, is used broadly as a way to encapsulate each of those words. Your voluntary participation in this study would include two rounds of semi-structured interviews and one focus group interview within an eight-week period. Each interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. If you meet the specified participant criteria and are interested in participating, please use the following link to review the participant information form and complete the participant eligibility survey: <https://redcap.vcu.edu/surveys/?s=HEFDRAT3DPYDHCJ8>

Participant Qualifications:

- Self-identifies as big-bodied Black women (this includes women that use descriptors such as plus size, thick, curvy, or something else);
- Is either a past or current educational professional (P-12 classroom teachers, university teaching faculty, instructional assistants, school administrators, or counselors);
- and, Lives in the United States

Participant follow-up/ first-round interview(s) email:**Subject:** <Action Requested> Scheduling Participant Interviews

Dear [Participant],

Thank you for your interest in participating in the study, *Race, Weight, Gender and the Embodied (odied, odied) Consciousness of Big-Bodied Black Women Educators: A Phenomenological Study*. After reviewing your responses to the Participant Eligibility Survey, I have determined that you qualify for participation in this study. Participant interviews will begin the week of [insert date]. Please use the following link to schedule your interview: calendly.com/kendrajohnson. Once on the scheduling page, you will select the “Participant Interview” option. From there, you can schedule your interview for the day and time that works best for you. A Zoom link will be shared with you at the time of scheduling. If you are in the Greater Metro Richmond area and would like to meet in-person, you may select the “Participant Interview- In-Person” option on the scheduling website. Please know that all CDC Covid-19 protocols will be observed during in-person meetings. Please let me know if you have any questions. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

With gratitude,

Kendra Johnson

Reminder Message-- to be sent 5 days prior to participant interviews:**Subject:** <Reminder> Participant Interview on [insert date]

Dear [participant],

This is a reminder that you have signed up to participate in the research study *Race, Weight, Gender and the Embodied (odied, odied) Consciousness of Big-Bodied Black Women Educators: A Phenomenological Study*.

You are scheduled for an individual interview on [date] at [time]. The interview will be conducted via Zoom. I have included the link here: [insert link]. Please know this is a unique link created specifically for our meeting, please do not share it. If you have any questions, please contact me at johnsonkd3@vcu.edu. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

With gratitude,

Kendra Johnson

2nd Round Participant Interviews:**Subject:** <Action Requested> Scheduling Participant Interviews

Dear [Participant],

Thank you for your interest in participating in the study, *Race, Weight, Gender and the Embodied (odied, odied) Consciousness of Big-Bodied Black Women Educators: A Phenomenological Study*. Please use the following link to schedule your second participant interview: calendly.com/kendrajohnson. Once on the scheduling page, you will select the “Participant Interview” option. From there, you can schedule your interview for the day and time that works best for you. A Zoom link will be shared with you at the time of scheduling. If you are in the Greater Metro Richmond area and would like to meet in-person, you may select the “Participant Interview- In-Person” option on the scheduling website. Please know that all CDC Covid-19 protocols will be observed during in-person meetings. Please let me know if you have any questions. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

With gratitude,

Kendra Johnson

Scheduling focus group email:**Subject:** <Action Requested> Scheduling Focus Group Email

Dear [Participant],

Thank you for participating in the study, *Race, Weight, Gender and the Embodied (odied, odied) Consciousness of Big-Bodied Black Women Educators: A Phenomenological Study*. The purpose of this email is to determine the best time to conduct a focus group.

Please use the following link to indicate your availability for the focus group. A Zoom link will be shared once all participants have shared their availability and a date has been determined. Please let me know if you have any questions. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

With gratitude,

Kendra Johnson

Appendix C: Participant Eligibility Questionnaire & Consent Form

Thank you for your interest in being part of this study. As a researcher, I am seeking to understand how race, weight, and gender impact the professional identities and experiences of big-bodied Black women. The purpose of this form is to collect your contact information and determine your eligibility for participation. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me via email (johnsonkd3@vcu.edu) or phone (804-200-9881).

Sincerely,
Kendra Johnson
Ph.D. Candidate
Virginia Commonwealth University

Name

Email Address

Phone Number

Location of Residence (City & State)

Do you identify as a Black woman? (yes/no)

Do you identify as big-bodied or any related terms such as plus size, thick, or curvy? (yes/no)

Do you now or have you ever worked as an educational professional (instructional assistant, classroom teacher, university instructor, school/ university administrator, counselor)? (yes/no)

What is your current role?

Are you able to meet two times for individual interviews for 60-90 minutes and once for a 90-minute focus group between November 2021 and March 2022?

Are you willing to be audio recorded via Zoom?

What days are you available to be interviewed? Check all that apply. (Lists days Sunday - Saturday)

What times are you available to be interviewed? Check all that apply.

Please describe any accommodations or supports you may need during the interview process. Is there any additional information you would like to provide about your possible participation in this study that has not been captured in previous questions?

My name is Kendra Johnson and I am a self-identified big-bodied Black woman and a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. My research looks at how race, gender, class, and social dynamics shape the experiences of Black girls and women in public education. I am conducting this research study in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum, Culture, and Change. This study will help me learn more about the experiences of big-bodied Black women educators. Within the Black American lexicon, words like "thick", "phat", and "plus size" have emerged as a way for women to reclaim agency over their/our bodies. The term "big-bodied", present throughout and across study materials, has been used heuristically as a way to encapsulate the each of those words. The purpose of this study is to develop a theoretical framework of big-bodied Black women's professional identity development through an exploration of how these women describe the influence of race, weight, gender, and body image on their professional experiences.

You are being invited to participate in a research study. It is important that you carefully think about whether being in this study is right for you and your situation. This form is meant to assist you in thinking about whether or not you want to be in this study. Please ask Kendra Johnson to explain any information in this consent document that is not clear to you. Please review the form in its entirety before making your decision.

Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study. If you do participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision not to take part or to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you can also request that your individual data be withdrawn and destroyed at the same time. Requests to have data destroyed can be made orally or via email to johnsonkd3@vcu.edu. Participants may withdraw their data from the study up until the point that identifiers are destroyed. Once identifiers have been removed from the data, the researcher will not be able to link data back to individual participants.

If you decide to participate in the study, you will be invited to two individual interviews and one focus group interview, each ranging from 60 to 90 minutes, within an eight week period between November 2021 and March 2022. The interviews and focus group are intended to give you an opportunity to reflect openly and candidly about your experiences in a setting where confidentiality will be protected. You must know that you will not be evaluated in any way. I am truly interested in your experiences and the sense you made of them. I hope you will be entirely true to yourself, and not answer in a way that you think might be pleasing to me. During the interviews and focus group, you will be asked a series of questions, but you reserve the right to not answer any questions that feel uncomfortable or deeply personal. During the focus group, you will be shown a concept map(s) that will reflect themes and big ideas that emerged from the individual interviews. Your participation in the focus group and concept map review will help enhance the trustworthiness and reliability of the study by ensuring that all stated conclusions accurately reflect the question under investigation. Additionally, after both rounds of individual interviews and the focus group, you will be invited to complete optional post-interview reflections of any additional thoughts and feelings you have about your experiences as a BBW educator. The purpose of this task is to allow you to reflect upon the focus of this study and what your experience has meant to you. You will have the opportunity to expand on any of your responses from the interview or add new anecdotes that were not captured during our time(s) together. You will receive a copy of your interview transcripts to help you with this task.

Study Overview and Key Information:

You may choose to do the interviews via Zoom or in person at a location of your choice. If we meet in person, masks and social distancing will be required, per the Covid-19 guidelines from the CDC. You will be asked to answer questions about your professional experiences. Zoom sessions will be video and audio recorded so they can be transcribed later for analysis. Video recordings will be deleted immediately once each session ends. Additionally, you may decide to keep your camera off during Zoom sessions. As part of this study, You will participate in two individual interviews for about 60- 90 minutes within an eight (8) week period. You will be able to determine the date and time for interviews that best fit your schedule. During the interviews, you will have the opportunity to review notes from the previous meeting and ask questions about your participation in the study. You may also be invited to participate in a focus group interview with other participants after your second interview. The focus group will be conducted via Zoom and recorded, with participants' permission.

What are the risks and benefits of participating?

There are both risks and benefits of participating in research studies. This study will ask you questions about personal topics that might be embarrassing to talk about. You may learn things about yourself that you did not know before and that could affect how you think about yourself. You may refuse to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable.

Risks and Discomforts Benefits to You and Others

- Participation in research might involve some loss of privacy. There is a small risk that someone outside the research study, including an employer, could see and misuse information about you.
- This is not a treatment study, and you are not expected to receive any direct benefits from your participation in the study. However, your participation may help the investigators better understand how race, weight, and gender function in society.
- The study asks questions that may be sensitive, personal, or upsetting in nature and may make you feel uncomfortable or other negative emotions

Can I stop being in the study?

This study will utilize participant interviews as the primary source of data collection. If at any point you would prefer not to be interviewed, you may withdraw from the study.

How will information about me be protected?

VCU has established secure research databases and computer systems to store information and to help with monitoring and oversight of research. Your information will be kept in these databases but are only accessible to individuals working on this study or authorized individuals who have access for specific research related tasks. Identifiable information in these databases will not be released outside VCU unless stated in this consent or required by law. Although results of this research may be presented at meetings or in publications, identifiable personal information about participants will not be disclosed.

Whom should I contact if I have questions about the study?

The investigator and university staff named below are the best person(s) to contact if you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about your participation in this research:

Kendra Johnson

Doctoral Student Investigator

Email: johnsonkd3@vcu.edu

Phone: (804) 200-9881

Dr. Hillary Parkhouse, Ph.D.

Dissertation Committee Chairperson

heparkhouse@vcu.edu

If you have general questions about your rights as a participant in this or any other research, or if you wish to discuss problems, concerns or questions, to obtain information, or to offer input about research, you may contact:

Virginia Commonwealth University Office of Research

800 East Leigh Street, Suite 3000, Box 980568, Richmond, VA 23298

(804) 827-2157; <https://research.vcu.edu/human-research/>

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and my choice to participate is the following:

- Yes, I wish to participate
 NO, I do NOT wish to participate

Appendix D: Interested Participant Non-Selection Email

Dear [insert name]

Thank you for your interest in participating in the study “Race, Weight, Gender and the Embodied (odied, odied) Consciousness of Big-Bodied Black Women Educators: A Phenomenological Study”. I appreciate you taking the time to complete the Participant Information and Eligibility Form. Due to the small sample size (n=10), I am unable to include you in future research activities for this study. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out via email or phone at (804) 200-9881.

With gratitude,

Kendra Johnson

Appendix E: Interview & Focus Group Protocols

Semi-Structured Interview 1:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study about the professional identity performance of big-bodied Black women educators and thank you for speaking with me today. The purpose of this first interview is to help me get to know you and learn about your personal and professional backgrounds. This interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes and is intended to give you an opportunity to reflect openly and candidly about your experiences in a setting where confidentiality is protected. You must know that you will not be evaluated in any way. I am truly interested in your experiences and the sense you made of them. I hope you will be entirely true to yourself, and not answer in a way that you think might be pleasing to me. I will ask a series of questions, but you reserve the right to not answer any questions that feel uncomfortable or deeply personal. Additionally, you may withdraw from the study at any time. I will be video and audio recording our discussion today so that I can transcribe it later for analysis. Video recordings will be deleted once the session is over. Additionally, you may decide to keep your camera off during our time together. I am in a private room by myself with headphones, so no one will be able to hear our conversation. For your comfort and privacy, you may also wish to participate in this interview in a space where you can maintain privacy. If you need to change locations, you can do that now and I will wait for your signal to begin. While I may use direct quotes from our discussion in my reporting, I will never attach identifying information to anything you say in any research reports. What questions do you have before we begin?

1. Why did you pursue a career in education?
 - a. Can you describe the context of your work?
2. How do you describe your body type?
3. Can you describe your relationship with or feelings toward your body?
4. Can you describe a time when either you or someone else used negative words to describe your body or outward appearance?

These first questions were fairly specific and factual. Now I am going to ask you more open-ended questions. In your responses, try to be as detailed as possible. I ask that you offer specific examples and stories when possible. Please avoid using names or other identifiable information in your answers.

5. Can you remember a time when you were in [school/ work] when you felt keenly aware of being a BBW?
6. Can you tell me about a time in your work when your relationship with your body felt challenging or complicated?
7. What do you think people don't see or understand about you as a BBW educator?
8. What additional information would you like to provide that hasn't been captured by any of the previous questions?

Additional prompts to encourage participants' reflections:

- Can you describe a time when you felt **surprised by the treatment of or response to your body?**
- Can you tell me about a time when your body felt important in your work?
- Can you describe a time when you were treated differently because of your body?

- Can you tell me about a time when your body worked for you or felt like an asset?
- How do you think students/ colleagues/ other staff at your school see you?
- For LED questions:
 - Can you remember who you were with? Please avoid including names or other identifiable information in your response.
 - Where were you when it happened?
 - What time of day was it?
 - What was happening in the background?
 - Can you tell me what happened right before the incident? Right after?
 - What do you mean when you say [xxxxxxx]?

Semi-Structured Interview 2:

Thank you for meeting with me again for this study about your professional identities and experiences. The purpose of this second interview is to expound on some of the ideas and themes that emerged from round one and ask follow-up questions, as necessary. Like the first interview, this interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes and is intended to give you an opportunity to reflect openly and candidly about your experiences in a setting where confidentiality is protected. You must know that you will not be evaluated in any way. I am truly interested in your experiences and the sense you made of them. I hope you will be entirely true to yourself, and not answer in a way that you think might be pleasing to me. I will ask a series of questions, but you reserve the right to not answer any questions that feel uncomfortable or deeply personal. Additionally, you may withdraw from the study at any time. I will be video and audio recording our discussion today so that I can transcribe it later for analysis. Video recordings will be deleted once the session is over. Additionally, you may decide to keep your camera off during our time together. I am in a private room by myself with headphones, so no one will be able to hear our conversation. For your comfort and privacy, you may also wish to participate in this interview in a space where you can maintain privacy. If you need to change locations, you can do that now and I will wait for your signal to begin. While I may use direct quotes from our discussion in my reporting, I will never attach identifying information to anything you say in any research reports. What questions do you have before we begin?

1. Based on the transcript I shared with you, is there anything you would like to revisit from our first interview?
 - a. [Based on previous interview data and emergent themes, I will prepare a few follow-up questions for each participant].
2. What stands out to you as a defining characteristic of BBW educators?
3. What biases and stereotypes surround BBW educators?

These first questions were fairly specific and factual. Now I am going to ask you more open-ended questions. In your responses, try to be as detailed as possible. I ask that you offer specific examples and stories when possible.

4. Can you describe a time someone projected their biases and stereotypes about BBWs onto you?

5. Can you describe an instance when your professional identity felt misaligned with the perceptions students, other teachers, or administrators had about you?
6. How did you, if at all, try to reconcile those misalignments?
7. Tell me about how your body feels when you feel like race, weight, and gender are respected or seen in a positive way?
8. What additional information would you like to provide?

Additional prompts to encourage participants' reflections:

- Can you tell me about a time when you felt most comfortable or even proud of your body?
- How often do you feel like you confront biases and stereotypes about your body?
- How do you describe your professional identity? How did it develop?
- For LED questions:
 - Can you remember who you were with? Please avoid including names or other identifiable information in your response.
 - Where were you when it happened?
 - What time of day was it?
 - What was happening in the background?
 - Can you tell me what happened right before the incident? Right after?
 - What do you mean when you say [xxxxxxx]?

Focus Group Protocol:

Thank you all for meeting with me today. The purpose of this focus group is to learn more about your experiences as educators, identify any commonalities in experience, and respond to the concept maps I have created based on the themes and big ideas that emerged from each of your individual interviews. Each of you has been asked to participate in the focus group because of your involvement in the study up to this point. As was the case with the individual interviews, this focus group will last approximately 90 minutes and is intended to give you an opportunity to reflect openly and candidly about your experiences in a setting where confidentiality is protected. I must ask that you do not share or repeat anything that has been said today outside of this setting. I also ask that you respect the views and opinions of the other participants in this group. If you would like to agree, question, or even disagree with something someone has shared, you may, but I ask that you be respectful and courteous of others at all times. As in the previous interviews, You must know that you will not be evaluated in any way. I am truly interested in your experiences and the sense you made of them. I hope you will be entirely true to yourself, and not answer in a way that you think might be pleasing to me. I will ask a series of questions, but you reserve the right to not answer any questions that feel uncomfortable or deeply personal. Additionally, you may withdraw from the study at any time. I will be video and audio recording our discussion today so that I can transcribe it later for analysis. Video recordings will be deleted once the session is over. Additionally, you may decide to keep your camera off during our time together. I am in a private room by myself with headphones, so no one will be able to hear our conversation. For your comfort and privacy, you may also wish to participate in this interview in a space where you can maintain privacy. If you need to change locations, you can do that now and I will wait for your signal to begin. While I may use direct quotes from our

discussion in my reporting, I will never attach identifying information to anything you say in any research reports. What questions do you have before we begin?

1. Based on either the transcripts or the concept map I shared with you, is there anything you would like to revisit from our second round of interviews?
 - a. [Based on previous interview data and emergent themes, I will prepare follow-up questions for each participant.]
 - b. Participants will be asked to respond to the concept map, in both high-level reaction ways and through specific questioning based on its actual content].
2. What do you want people to know or understand about being a BBW educator?

These first questions were fairly specific and factual. Now I am going to ask you more open-ended questions. In your responses, try to be as detailed as possible. I ask that you offer specific examples and stories when possible.

3. Can you describe a time when you felt the most seen, supported, or appreciated as a BBW?
4. Tell me about the systems or practices that make you feel most comfortable or supported in your work?
5. Can you tell me about a time in your work when you felt most proud of being a BBW educator?
6. What additional information would you like to provide?

Post-Interview Reflection Email (to be sent after each round of interviews)-- Sent within 48-72 hours of interviews.

Subject: Optional Post-Interview Reflection Request

Dear [Participant],

Thank you for your time and reflections during our conversation on [date]. I enjoyed learning about your experiences and I sincerely appreciate your willingness to speak with me. As part of the research study, I am inviting you to complete a post-interview reflection of any additional thoughts and feelings you have about your experiences as a BBW educator. The purpose of this task is to allow you to reflect upon the focus of this study and what your experience has meant to you. Please take this opportunity to expand on any of your responses from the interview or add new anecdotes that were not captured during our time together. I have attached a copy of your interview transcript to this email to help you with this task. Please use this link [insert Redcap link] to complete your post-interview reflection. All reflections should be submitted by [date]. Please let me know if you have any questions.

With gratitude,

Kendra

Appendix F: Codebook

Abbreviation	Definition
STEREO_Pervasiness	Participant discusses the pervasiveness of stereotypes around body, general
STEREO_Mammy	Participant explicitly states or describes stereotypes associated with mammy image, specifically with white and other non-Black people
STEREO_Matriarch	Participant explicitly states or describes stereotypes associated with mammy image, specifically with Black folks
STEREO_Fat	Participant describes or discusses stereotypes associated with fat bodies
STEREO_Black	Participant describes or discusses stereotypes associated with Black bodies
STEREO_InterOther	Participant describes or discusses intersectional stereotypes and/or other forms of stereotyping
STEREO_SelfAware	Participant describes when they were aware of being stereotyped.
STEREO_Unaware	Participant describes an instance when she was being stereotyped but either misinterprets the situation or processes just one possible form of being stereotyped.
STEREO_FABW	Participant describes or discusses stereotypes around being a fat, angry, Black woman
STEREO_FJWB	Participant describes or discusses stereotypes around being a fat, jolly Black woman
STEREO_BigScary	
PERFORM_Fat	Participant describes instances when playing up/into body size
PERFORM_Gender	Participant describes instances when playing up/ into gender
PERFORM_Trope	Participant describes instances when playing up/ into tropes
LED_Prof	Participant describes LED from professional context
LED_Pers	Participant describes LED from personal context AND connects it to professional experience
TREAT_Pos	Participant describes personally being treated positively at the intersection of race, weight, and gender
TREAT_Neg	Participant describes personally being treated negatively at the intersection of race, weight, and gender
TREAT_Obj	Participant describes personally being objectified at the intersection of race, weight, and gender
TREAT_Sex	Participant describes experiencing sexism at the intersection of race, weight, and gender
CHANGE_Behavior	Participant describes a change in behavior after a significant LED
CHANGE_Attitude	Participant describes a change in attitude after a significant LED
CHANGE_Appearance	Participant describes making a change in appearance after a significant LED
BODYPRES_Min	Participant describes body presentation methods that draw attention away from her or parts of her body
BODYPRES_Max	Participant describes body presentation methods that draw attention to her or parts of her body
BODYPRES_Gen	Participant talks about body presentation in general terms
POLICED_DressCode_Ext	Participant describes feeling policed through dresscode by external people
POLICED_Behavior	Participant describes feeling like her behavior was being policed.
PAST_FatHistory	Participant describes history with fatness
NAVSPACE_Phys	Participant describes instances of navigating physical spaces as a BBW
NAVSPACE_CogSymb	Participant describes instances of cognitively navigating symbolic space. Psychological negotiations.
NAVSPACE_Acc	Participant describes physical accessibility of school/ institution space

Abbreviation	Definition
PERC_Access	Participant describes perceived access to space
PERC_Accept	Participant describes perceived acceptant in space
PRIV_Color	Participant describes differential treatment based on skin tone/ complexion
PRIV_Des	Participant describes differential treatment based on perceived desirability
PRIV_Shapism	Participant describes differential treatment based on body shape
BODY_Empowered	Participant describes instances where she felt empowered as a BBW
BODY_Disempowered	Participant describes instances where she felt disempowered as a BBW
PERCEP_Self	Participant describes her perception of self
PERCEP_Stu	Participant describes perceptions students have about her
PERCEP_Col	Participant describes perceptions colleagues have about her
PERCEP_Per	Participant describes perceptions from people with whom she has personal relationships
PERCEP_Gen	Participant describes perceptions of her from no one in particular
PERCEP_Conf	Participant describes being perceived as confident
PERCEP_Agg	Participant describes being perceived as aggressive
REL_Self	Participant describes personal relationship with self/ body
REL_Stu	Participant describes how being a BBW impacts relationships with students
REL_Col	Participant describes how being a BBW impacts relationships with colleagues
REL_Personal	Participant describes how being a BBW impacts personal relationships
COMM_Black	Participant speaks of Black community writ large
COMM_Fat	Participant speaks of fat community within Black community
OPP_Black	Participant describes being oppressed by Black people
OPP_NonBlack	Participant describes being oppressed by non-Black people
POLI_Institutional	Participant discusses instional policies
POLI_Systemic	participant discusses systemic policies/ oppression
AntiFat_Attitude	
REC_Systems	Systematic recommendations
REC_Attitudes	Attitudinal/ mindset recommendations

Appendix G: Preliminary Themes

Theme 1: BBW is a distinctive social identity with its own modes of embodiment.
Theme 2: When confronted with structural and institutional barriers, BBW educators that were big-bodied children often experience visceral returns to adolescent/ student experiences. These moments of harkening back to past experiences erode the presumed safety of academic institutions.
Theme 3: BBW educators in K-12 settings encounter anti-Black and anti-fat attitudes almost exclusively from colleagues and administrators.
Theme 4: BBW educators in higher education are more likely to encounter anti-fat and anti-Black attitudes from students. Their experiences are often compounded by an additional layer of sexism.
Theme 5: In response to adversarial experiences, BBW educators perform different modes of embodiment as methods of self-preservation.
Theme 6: BBW educators engage in on-going psychological negotiations of identity performance and body presentation...
Theme 7: BBWs encounter exaggerated tropes and stereotypes in academic institutions. The tropes work to diminish the intellectual capacity of BBW educators. The tropes also bring to question the purpose, function, and expectations of BBW educators.
Theme 8: The big, Black, femme body is regarded as less human and less womanly and is read as needing to be controlled. Written and unwritten policies are imposed more severely on BBWs in education.
Theme 9: Structural barriers (desks, room spacing and configurations, etc.) indoctrinate BBW educators to the idea that certain bodies hold more value in ed spaces. These barriers also present significant navigational challenges for BBW teachers.
Theme 10: BBW educators don't often feel empowered to call out instances of anti-Black, anti-fat oppression because the intersection of race and weight stigma is not yet deeply understood. BBWs often turn to other BBWs for solace and community when confronted

Vita

Kendra DaNise Johnson was born June 14, 1991 in Richmond, Virginia. She is a 2009 graduate of Varina High School, a 2013 graduate of Hampton University, and a 2017 graduate of Johns Hopkins University. Before transitioning into her current role as the Anti-Racist Specialist for the Richmond Teacher Residency (RTR) program, Kendra worked as an elementary school teacher and leader (2013-2019), instructional coach (2019-2021), and teacher residency program coordinator (2019-2021).