

#RATCHETQUEERTEACHER: SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AND  
LIBERATION THROUGH MINDFULNESS AND HIP HOP THERAPY

by

Torie C. Wheatley

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Approved by:

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Dr. Chance Lewis

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Dr. Lisa Merriweather

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Dr. Bettie Ray Butler

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Dr. Susan Harden



## ABSTRACT

TORIE C. WHEATLEY. #Ratchetqueerteacher: Social, Emotional Well-Being And Liberation Through Mindfulness And Hip Hop Therapy. (Under the direction of DR. CHANCE LEWIS)

There is a growing mental health concern among Black Ratchet queer womxn in educational and criminal justice realms and the Covid-19 pandemic has left the educational climate in a state of high stress and anxiety. Consequently, Black Womxn in education are quitting from burnout. According to research, teacher burnout has been a concern for more than 30 years, but currently there is a crisis. According to research, “This is a five-alarm crisis. We are facing an exodus as more than half of our nation’s teachers and other school staff are now indicating they will be leaving education sooner than planned” (Jotkoff, 2022).

Covid-19 has caused an increase in depression, anxiety, suicide ideation, and other health concerns in this population. External hindrances including racism, sexism, homophobia, and other ideologies rooted in America; negatively influence their mental well-being. Black queer womxn and girls are restricted from obtaining proper access to mental health services that take into consideration how identities are critical factors in mental well-being. This analysis will provide a rationale for utilizing culturally relevant mindfulness practices for Black queer womxn and girls in educational sectors.

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## DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this to my God and my family; you are the air that I breathe and my motivation to live unapologetically. I dedicate this work to my angels, forever students and support sisters at North Meck that keep me protected and grounded: Nay Nay, Marcus, Martiya, Johnny, Kenya Blair, and Lauren Talton. I dedicate this piece to my inspirations, my light... my “other” babies, my students/youth. This work is dedicated to the Black, Brown, and Indigenous bodies that carved out a path for me to dream and live, especially those that self-identify as queer and woman, womxn, femme, girl, and all the glorious in between. This is dedicated to the little Black girls, studs, and femmes that are ratchet, kind, brilliant, weird, beautiful, hood, and untraditional. You are divine excellence! This work is for the Black and Brown bodies that are held down by unjust correctional systems instead of being uplifted and rehabilitated. This is dedicated to Hip Hop and Black Mental Health. THIS IS FOR YOU! I SEE YOU! I LOVE YOU!

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*The Washington Post* stated that “The teacher shortage in America has hit crisis levels” as a result of the global Covid 19-pandemic and lockdown (Natanson, 2022). Coming back to the classroom, post-pandemic has created new challenges in terms of mental well-being, thus negatively impacting teacher retention, especially for ratchet Black queer womxn teachers. The term “ratchet” is a complex word with no definite meaning that contains both positive and negative connotations. The term means a liberatory consciousness that undermines misogynistic, heteronormative, and anti-Black societal messages that challenge and prevent our well-being (McEachern, 2017). Ratchet is also defined as the merging and liberational embodiment of both ratchet aesthetics and Hip Hop culture as defined in the previous context. The term is commonly defined as a slang term that can mean “exciting” or “excellent,” often used as a term of empowerment among womxn, but the negative connotation is a womxn that is “over dramatic” or sexually liberated (“promiscuous”) (dictionary.com). In certain contexts, ratchet can be synonymous with the terminology “hood,” but is often referred to when addressing a Black womxn.

Womanhood and girlhood are terms that are transcending beyond just biological gender identification; it is becoming more inclusive of all femme or feminine intersectionalities defined by a patriarchal white supremacist perspective. According to The University of California, the use of the “x” is intended to be inclusive of gender non-conforming individuals, genderqueer folx, two spirit people, femmes, transgender folx, and non-binary people as well as cis-gendered womxn (University Of California Irving, 2021). Throughout this investigation the word *womxn* will be used to describe myself and others that self-identified as a woman and/or femme identities.

This trend of teacher shortages can be seen worldwide. A report revealed the worldwide teacher shortage by stating that 69 million teachers are needed to obtain “universal basic education by 2030,” with the largest deficit being in sub-Saharan Africa (Azoulay, 2022,p.1). According to Guijarro-Ojeda et al. (2021), “in the United Kingdom, up to 57% of teachers have considered abandoning the profession due to health problems derived from stress, work overload, or the impossibility of finding a healthy balance between work and private life” (p. 2). A survey revealed that American K-12 public school educators were the most likely to report increased levels of anxiety, stress, demoralization and burnout during the pandemic with four out of 10 teachers considering changing jobs and a quarter of teachers considering quitting (Hess, 2021; Walker2021).

With the teacher shortage increasing, those who are left in the profession are further burdened by taking on extra work in the field. A report out of North Carolina compared teacher and support staff vacancies prior to and post-pandemic: 950 to 1,570 in elementary schools; from 672 to 1,023 in middle schools; from 728 to 1,024 in high schools, from 253 to 354 for counselors, social workers, and psychologists; from 3,900 to 4,364 for classified positions; and from 1,131 to 1,342 for bus drivers (Rash & Rash, 2022). More alarming statistics reveal the lack of teacher retention by providing information pertaining to teacher vacancies. One report explained the following:

Nearly half (44 percent) of public schools currently report full- or part-time teaching vacancies... Of public schools with at least one reported vacancy, 61 percent specifically identified the COVID-19 pandemic as a cause of increased teaching and non-teaching staff vacancies. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022b)

Since the pandemic, teacher retention has been affected due to mental health challenges;

61% of teachers nationwide were often or always stressed at work, which is double when compared to non-teaching adults (Mental Health America, 2020). Additionally, 58% of educators have expressed poor mental health due to stress (Mental Health America, 2020). Research also notes that one in four teachers have considered quitting due to personal and professional conditions and 44% of public schools have reported an increase in vacancies (Hess, 2021) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022b). There is an increasing need to focus attention on solutions that support teacher mental health. Mental health or well-being is being used simultaneously in educational research with the term social emotional learning/wellness (SEL). The emphasis on social and emotional initiatives in American public-schools have been the priority for supporting students' mental wellness (Reilly, 2022).

Despite the increase in initiatives for supporting the mental well-being of students, there remains a gap in research that investigates social and emotional initiatives for educators that are helping students cope with their personal, pandemic, and systemic traumas. This experience is described as vicarious traumatization (Philibert et al., 2020). An empirical study revealed that an increase in teachers' job demands were direct correlations to a decline in mental health, coping with stress, and feeling inadequate at their job (Metrailler & Clark, 2022). For Black womxn teachers, the job demand in a post-pandemic classroom has increased. There is a particular need to support the well-being of those with marginalized identities that defy oppressive Americanized patriarchal heteronormative standards, in particular Black womxn teachers. Research reveals that womxn have a higher risk of developing symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression in compared to men, an investigation discovered that resilience is a key factor in coping with such mental stressors (Matiz et al., 2020). Black women teachers are encountering similar health risks. Statistics show that Black womxn in education are leaving or quitting the

profession at high rates due to work related stressors (Walton et al., 2021). This research focuses on exploring how culturally relevant mindfulness practices and Hip Hop therapy support mental well-being which leads to liberatory educational spaces. In this investigation mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) will be used interchangeably throughout the investigation.

### **Statement of Problem**

The pandemic has caused an increase in depression, anxiety, suicide ideation, and other health concerns within the Black and queer population (Panchal et al., 2021). Because of the intersectionalities of being Black and Queer and womxn/girl, external hindrances including racism, sexism, homophobia, and other ideologies rooted in America have a greater negative influence on mental well-being. These intersectionalities also restrict Black queer womxn and girls from obtaining proper access to mental health services that take into consideration how these identities are critical factors in social and emotional development. Despite battling with pandemic and personal trauma, grief, imposter syndrome, a recent diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and systemic racism in the curriculum and systems of education, I made it a priority to affirm my students and colleagues' mental well-being as the social and emotional coordinator at my school. While prioritizing the mental health of others, this question arises: "How am I taking care of my mental health as a Black, queer, womxn, that embodies an outgoing personality that can be perceived as boisterous, expressive, ghetto, hood, or "ratchet"?"

To help manage my social and emotional well-being, my liberation and relief resided in the therapy I received from Hip Hop music, particularly more Southern-influenced Hip Hop such as Trap music and ratchet Hip Hop aesthetics. Various elements of verve and written expression in Hip Hop music are also articulated in Hip Hop Therapy. This concept will be analyzed in

depth in the proceeding sections. Alongside, Hip Hop I have also utilized other holistic alternatives including culturally relevant mindfulness practices. Since the start of the pandemic, mindfulness practices like meditation and yoga have been shown to reduce stress and improve other chronic illnesses. Research suggests that these practices are most effective when they are centered around culturally relevant practices and pedagogy.

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is a term coined by Dr. Ladson-Billings to describe a pedagogical practice of teachers that embraces the cultures and identities of marginalized students, especially Black students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In this examination, culturally relevant refers to the integration of culture and identity into practice. The overall problem that this research addresses is the decline in mental well-being for Black, queer, women teachers caused by the pandemic, respectability politics, and racial battle fatigue. As a result of the decline in mental well-being, teacher retention is impacted causing a teacher shortage. The decrease of educators that are advocates of students with diverse intersectionalities or educators that identify with one or all the intersectionality that mirror identities of students, reduces the visibility and advocacy of these students in supporting their mental well-being. Ethnic and cultural matching for Black queer ratchet girls in schools are needed to combat ideologies within education that are centered in the White male heterosexual lens.

### **Mental Health Impacts Black Queer Teacher Shortage in Pandemic**

In North Carolina, research shows the increase in teacher vacancies in elementary, middle, and high school, especially with Black teachers. Since the *Belk v. Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education* court case in 1997 which attempted to regain and retain Black teachers, there has been a decline of Black teacher retention in Charlotte, North Carolina school district (Williams et al., 2020). In the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District (CMS), only 25%

of the teacher population is Black (Williams et al., 2020). A recent study revealed that Black teacher turnover rate is nearly 60% greater than the non-Black teacher turnover rate and the turnover rate for Black women is significantly greater than that of non-Black women (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention report, the pandemic has also intensified systemic social inequities and impact social and emotional well-being for marginalized people, in particular Black people:

Persistent systemic social inequities and discrimination related to living conditions and work environments, which contribute to disparities in underlying medical conditions, can further compound health problems faced by members of racial and ethnic minority groups during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and worsen stress and associated mental health concerns. (McKnight-Eily, 2021)

The trends of high levels of stress and mental turmoil for Black women teachers is becoming a concern that can impact educational spaces. Research reveals that Black teachers experience the health impact of the pandemic significantly more than their white colleagues (Baker et al., 2021).

Research reveals that teachers who experience an increase in job related stress may experience poor relationships with students, a decrease in teacher retention, negative feelings toward school's climate, increased levels of occupational stress, and poor mental/physical health (Metrailler & Clark, 2022). Occupational stress is defined as "the experience by a teacher of unpleasant emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration, or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher" (Kyriacou, 2001, p. 28). A major contributor of occupational stress during the pandemic was an increase of teacher job demands which resulted in a decline of mental health (Metrailler & Clark, 2022). When shifting the perspective in analyzing specifically Black teachers, the need for mental health support becomes evident. A

qualitative study revealed that “Black teachers were significantly more likely than their White colleagues to report an increase in workload”(Baker et al., p.6,2021). As a result of poor mental health, Black womxn teachers are leaving the workforce, thus creating a teacher shortage due to the lack of teacher retention.

### **Black and Queer Teacher Retention**

The layers of racialized, gendered, and ideological marginalization that Black Queer womxn educators endure can result in burnout or permanent pushout from the profession (Johnson & Kohli, 2020). In a recent *Time* report, nearly half of Black teachers reported in the winter of 2021 that they were likely to leave their jobs at the end of the school year, compared with 23% of teachers overall (Carr, 2022). Research grounded in the perspective of a Black womxn educator revealed that racial discrimination and racial stress from white privilege and Eurocentric ideologies within education are major contributors to a decline in mental and social health that include anxiety, depression, personality disorders, and PTSD (Hancock et al., 2020). Adding to historical oppression, the pandemic, curriculum, policy changes, and finding a sense of normalcy in a rapidly changing profession prohibits the advancement of mental health (Cormier et al., 2021).

Research demonstrates that racial stress, hostile school culture, and lack of support can make Black women teachers more prone to depression and fatigue (Hancock et al., 2020). It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that Black teachers experience levels of stress beyond their white counterparts that can produce poor mental and physical health outcomes. Merriweather (2015) reveals how historical context continue to plague Black womxn by stating: Historical archetypes equating Black and female as lazy, loud, rude, hypersexual, uneducated, and irresponsible have been operationalized by majoritarian narratives of Black female identity.

These common narratives have framed public opinion resulting in the othering of African American female academics, an othering that isolates and demeans. (p. 3) It is critical for Black students to be ethnically matched with teachers who have similar cultural experiences. These experiences transcend race, gender identity, self-expression, or hood. *Ethnic matching* refers to the pairing of a person receiving a service from a professional in which the two share the same race/ethnicity (Glock & Schuchart, 2019). The results of ethnic matching in these areas produce stronger recovery from mental health issues, better job satisfaction, stronger college retention, and higher academic achievement (Glock & Schuchart, 2019).

Statistics revealed that 59% of LGBTQIA+ adults and 60% of transgender adults are battling poor mental health today. Because of poor mental and physical health, 19% of LGBTQIA+ adults and 28% of transgender adults say they have sustained periods of time in which they are unable to do usual activities, such as self-care, work, or recreation, compared to 15% of non-LGBTQ adults (Human Rights Campaign, 2020). Research showing the impact of Queer representation in the classroom reveals that visibility is imperative for queer students to support their challenges, yet there is a gap in research that exclusively addresses Black Queer educator mental health (Mayo, 2014). A recent report revealed that addressing mental health and social and emotional needs of teachers of color, especially Black and Brown educators, are multilayered, thus resulting in a lack of research on the topics (Cormier et al., 2021).

### **Need for Black and Queer Teachers**

Only 7% of public-school teachers are Black (Terada, 2021). Research illustrates that Black teachers serve as protective mechanisms for Black students by being culturally responsive and supporting their academic success significantly more than other teachers (Johnson & Kohli, 2020). Historically, Black womxn teachers have been trailblazers in fighting for racial injustice



for Black students and communities in America (Farinde-Wu et al., 2020). In North Carolina, studies disclose that the disproportionate number of Black student suspension is due to schools being saturated with white woman teachers, thus increasing Black teacher visibility is essential for their success (Williams et al., 2020). Black teachers bring personal experience with an insight into racism and ethnocentrism into their pedagogical practices (Johnson & Kohli, 2020). Through these experiences, many teachers and students of color have been exposed to ways of using language, interacting, and approaching tasks that are distinct from those of most white teachers (Villegas et al., 2012). Research demonstrates that Black women in public school sectors improve the outcomes of students of color in that a racially and ethnically diverse teacher workforce positively impacts the social and academic progress of all students, particularly students of color (Farinde-Wu et al., 2020). Black female teachers comprise only 5% of all public-school teachers in America and have higher turnover rates than their white colleagues (Farinde-Wu et al., 2020). Out of that percentage of Black teachers, roughly 76% are women (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this autoethnographic study is to explore the impact that culturally relevant mindfulness practices and Hip Hop therapy have on my social and emotional well-being as a ratchet Black Queer womxn educator. The study intends to inform research on the mental impact of lived experiences of educators with similarly situated intersectionalities.

### **Research Questions**

The anchor questions that will be analyzed in this research are:

1. How do my intersectionalities of being a ratchet Black queer womxn impact my social and emotional well-being as an educator?

2. In what ways do culturally relevant practices and elements of Hip Hop therapy support the social and emotional well-being of my intersectionalities in combating respectability politics as an educator?
3. How have culturally relevant mindfulness practices and Hip Hop therapy led to liberatory educational space?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that will be utilized is Black Ratchet Imagination. Through these intersecting lenses, researchers can gauge and understand the lived experiences of womxn that refuse respectability politics within their journey for social, emotional, and physical survival. Black Ratchet Imagination merges the use of Hip Hop feminism and Queer theory as a foundation.

#### **Black Ratchet Imagination**

The theoretical framework that will be utilized in the study is Black ratchet imagination. According to Love, Black ratchet imagination “recognizes and affirms the full humanity of Black queer youth for their sexual desires, multiple identities, economic status, style of dress, language, music, and dance; simply stated, a methodological perspective that acknowledges Black queer youth’s precocity (Love, 2017). Using Black Ratchet imaginative theory at the forefront, this study analyzes the impact that “ratchet” Hip Hop music and mindfulness practices have on the mental well-being of Black, Queer, and/or Woman Hip Hop enthusiasts in education. Ratchet music originated in the early 2000’s in which it grew popularity in the strip clubs with the emphasize on the movement of the buttock and an “infectious hook”, “stripping and the strip clubs are important features not only to hip-hop but also BQW’s [Black Queer Women’s] constellations of scene spaces” (Lane, pp.76-77, 2019). Scene spaces is referred to a Black queer

woman's social network that comprises allies and other Black queer womxn. The need to create or find a space of belonging is critical in this work. According to Love (2017):

Black ratchet imagination lens is a fluid methodological perspective that recognizes, appreciates, and struggles with the agency and knowledge production of Black queer youth who are resisting, succumbing to, and finding pleasure in hip hop by undoing the heteropatriarchal, liberating, queer, homophobic, sexist, feminist, hyper-local, global, ratchet, and conservative space of hip hop(9).

The core of Black Ratchet Imagination as theory and methodology is centralized in Hip Hop music, culture, and aesthetics. The central pillars and elements of Black ratchet imagination are “intersectionality, agency, fluidity, and understanding Black youth’s precariousness,” as well as the influence of Hip Hop music and culture, especially of southern influence (Love, 2017, p.544). The framework and pillars guided the study by analyzing my experiences as an educator with unique identities that contribute to how I maneuver educational and personal spaces.

Although Black ratchet imagination lens focuses on Black Queer youth finding their place and being in the moment, this element of having one or all three intersectionalities and finding a place in an educational system that is corrupted of White Supremist for self-proclaimed “ratchet” educators and educational stakeholders that embrace Hip Hop culture, (i.e., music, dance, pop culture.). According to Love (2017) the uses and methodology of *Black Ratchet Imagination*, allows for researchers to explore Black queer youth perspective and participating in Black social spaces and cultural practices to form subversive and creative spaces that humanize (Love,2017). Because two of those three intersectionalities apply to educators that experience similar lifestyles of their students, Black Ratchet Imagination as a methodological approach is appropriate because of its “messy” interpretation, as described by Love (2017).

Black Ratchet imaginative theory in this study analyzes the impact of liberation through having a safe and creative space to unapologetically express the authentic “ratchet” self that is not defined by the white male gaze. Black Ratchet imagination is “tapping into the Black Ratchet Imagination-taking a moment out of their lives to be irresponsible, bad feminists and bad respectable women” (Lane, p.86, 2019). By creating a space that articulates the voices that support the social and emotional well-being of Black queerness and self-identified womanhood through Hip Hop music and mindfulness practices have on the mental well-being of Black, Queer, and/or Woman Hip Hop enthusiasts in education. According to Love (2017), Black Ratchet Imagination lens is a fluid methodological perspective that recognizes, appreciates, and struggles with the agency and knowledge production of Black queer youth who are resisting, succumbing to, and finding pleasure in hip hop by undoing the heteropatriarchal, liberating, queer, homophobic, sexist, feminist, hyper-local, global, ratchet, and conservative space of hip hop (p. 9). The core of Black Ratchet Imagination as theory and methodology is centralized in Hip Hop music, culture, and aesthetics. According to Love (2017), the uses and methodology of *Black Ratchet Imagination* allows for researchers to explore Black queer youth perspective and participating in Black social spaces and cultural practices to form subversive and creative spaces that humanize (Love, 2017). Because two of those three intersectionalities apply to educators who experience similar life-styles of their students, Black Ratchet Imagination as a methodological approach is appropriate because of its “messy” interpretation, as described by Love (2017). Queer people of color find it difficult to find their voice and positionality in society because of systemic assaults on their humanity (Brockenbrough, 2014). As a result, ball and house culture was created to support the social and emotional well-being of Black and Latinex individuals of the LGBTQIA+ community. The balls served as liberatory spaces.

Brockenbrough (2014) stated:

houses are family-like organizations among Black and Latino queers that began to emerge in 1960s Harlem. Often headed by older individuals who assume the titles of “mother” or “father,” houses are kinship groups that provide support and a sense of belonging to their members. (p. 6)

The concept of creating a liberatory space with the influence of elements of Hip Hop such as dance and fashion can create a similar safe space. Black queer women “fall outside of the racialized gender script of proper Black womanhood and are often marginalized within the black community”(Lane,p.12, 2019).

Black Ratchet Imagination illustrates the complexities of ratchet, Black, and womxn identities which impact social and emotional well-being. Within both theories, my identity as “Black” is a primary factor because it is the one aspect of my identity that society notices before my gender and sexuality. This is also where I hold my most pride. Ratchet embodies my connectedness with Hip Hop culture and music as a mode of liberation. Ratchet also pays homage to queer expression within Hip Hop as liberation. This framework is composed of four anchor cornerstones: finding self, finding voice, denying whiteness, and limitations from race.

A critical component in the framework is the theme of liberation and the act of finding self. Finding self is the foundation of the framework because it analyzes the impact that history, society, and Hip Hop culture has on the process of discovering the authentic self. The process of self- discovery through these interactions contribute to identity development. This identity includes the discovery or reaffirming of morals, ethics, beliefs, ideologies, gender, and sexuality. The process of identity development is a continuum in which finding self is a constant procedure.

Another fundamental component within the theory is finding voice. Finding voice is critical because Black queer women historically have paved the way for liberation which resulted in equity for all. The ability to find voice is impacted through dialogue, storytelling as counter narrative, the inclusivity of Black womxn, and being the voice to marginalized communities. This element is rooted in the theory because it emphasizes the importance of telling one's own story in the power of that story. Hip Hop historically has been that mechanism for Black and Brown mainly male youth for finding voice; the culture has evolved and is becoming more inclusive of womxn and femme voices (Rose, 1994). Finding voice also refers to how ratchet identities find their authentic voice by rejecting white standards of acceptability and embracing the essence of being unorthodox and complex. In education, it is critical to model and teach students how to find their unique voices. The act of storytelling and explaining one's truth is liberation. In Hip Hop therapy, the act of curating rap and poetry to navigate the world and share one's authentic voice supports mental well-being (Winfrey, 2009).

The final correlating factor that integrates the theories is denying whiteness. Denying whiteness is defined as the ability to interrupt and navigate white spaces of oppression by being authentically Black and ratchet as a form of liberation. The attributes of denying whiteness include liberation from hegemony, development differs between cultures, and anti-essentialism. Liberation from hegemonic white supremacist norms is critical within this research because it emphasizes the need to embrace diverse perspectives and ideologies that are not subjected to the norms of white America. Black, ratchet, queer, and womxn identities embody the essence of liberation from hegemonic norms. This tenant is influenced by Black Feminist Thought because it understands that race is a social construct created by the dominant culture that influences access to resources and power.

### **Methods Overview and Researcher Positionality**

This investigation will be an autoethnographic qualitative research design. Tsuchimoto (2021) described autoethnography as “descriptive research in the social sciences that aims to understand the ‘researcher’s ‘own culture ’”(Tsuchimoto, 2021). This autoethnography will be constructed as an analytical autoethnography. The data that will be collected through the investigation will be an autobiographical line graph, journaling with writing prompts, informant interview using interview guide, cultural artifacts (photos, social media post, text messages, emails), and video/voice recordings of reflections and casual informant conversations (Chang, p.87). I will analyze the data using thematic analysis (TA). Thematic analysis is defined as “a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (“themes”) within qualitative data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To address subjectivity in the study, I acknowledge that I am a Black self-identified ratchet, lesbian, cisgendered woman in an environment in which I am allowed to be my authentic self through the investigation. My experiences do not mirror the experiences of all peoples with similarly situated intersectionalities. I also acknowledge my privilege as being a cisgendered womxn who is of the aesthetic of what is considered “feminine.”

The ongoing adjustment to the new normal of the pandemic has caused stressors and trauma that impacted my mental health as an educator; these experiences are mirrored in my students and colleagues. The pandemic has exposed my emotional vulnerability and need to prioritize my social and emotional well-being, as well as colleagues and students of similar intersectionalities. As an educator that identifies as a Black, Ratchet, Queer womxn, I had to deal with trauma in my personal and professional life simultaneously. I often found salvation within my identity as a Hip Hop enthusiast and pedagogist and noticed that several of my students and

colleagues also found their peace in Hip Hop. From New York City drill music to down south trap, Hip Hop music of all genres is what we confided in for a sense of release in the tension. These experiences are the result of the climate of education as a result of the pandemic. Many events that transpired in my personal life negatively impacted my mental health and cradled my battle with anxiety and depression; as well as a deeper empathy and understanding for suicide ideation. Turmoil that caused my mental health to be challenged included coping with the unexpected overdose of my uncle, who reminded me of the late rapper DMX, after being released from jail over a decade ago. Proceeding that turning point in life, followed the Covid related death of a beloved colleague that loved Juvenile's "Back that Azz Up" and mourning the 1 year loss of my amazingly over-the-top, expressive and "ratchet" student to a mysterious illness that dimmed her light in stardom too soon. On the other hand, these experiences motivated me to seriously invest in my students mental well-being through mindfulness and obtain a certification in implementing elements of Hip Hop therapy. Upon obtaining my Hip Hop therapy certification, more stress and trauma accrued in the school year.

I have endured my student, a little rambunctious Black girl, being hassled and handcuffed during her mental breakdown because of responding in the manner in which her environment was created. Her classmates and I had to endure her heartbreaking muffled yell wailing, "I can't breathe, let me go! I just want Ms. Wheatley!" This incident is reminiscent of the so many Black faces that once spoke those words. This same little girl would make TikTok's with me of us doing her dance "The Sturdy" as we listened to Pop Smoke when she overcame an obstacle in class. Hip Hop was our therapy and liberation.

With the climate of school changing and mental health causing a shift in school climate, there has been an increase in school violence that has also placed a toll on social and emotional



well-being. In response to the increase in school violence and shootings, there was a heavy police and correctional presence that included police dogs and isolation into a designated area to be searched for security screenings and me being told that I cannot console a student having an anxiety attack. This caused an environment of great mental stress and triggered my students' personal experiences with police officers or the “opps,” as my students say. Yet, I understand why my students aggressively serenading Hip Hop songs with the theme of “Fuck the OPPS” when Black bodies are being killed by them. These songs I find comfort in as I aggressively sing along to the heartbeat of the hood. These factors contributed greatly to the plight of my mental well-being as an educator. Retaining educators who share the same intersectionality of race, gender, and cultural understanding as their students harvest a valuable role in education, thus preserving the mental well-being of these educators is imperative for students who share a similar intersectionality. With teachers’ mental, physical, and emotional workload increasing, occupational stress levels are also at its highest because of the pandemic, thus impacting overall school climate. Teacher occupational stress is “the experience by a teacher of unpleasant emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration, or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher” (Kyriacou, 2001, p. 28) (as cited in Metrailer & Clark, 2022, p.7).

### **Significance of Study**

The critical problem that this study addresses is the social and emotional impact of respectability politics and pandemic stressors on Black and queer teachers, as well as social and emotional supports that combat respectability politics. The gap in practice and educational research that the study will also examine is the impact of intersectionalities of educators and how these intersectionalities influence practice and mental well-being. Farinde-Wu (2020) stated in recent research that a racially and ethnically diverse teacher workforce positively impacts the

social and academic progress of all students, particularly students of color (Farinde-Wu et al., 2020). Although there is an emerging interest in research that analyzes Hip Hop therapy and pedagogy for adolescents, there is a need for research to evaluate the use of these practices to support the social and emotional support of educators. The cultural issue that is addressed is Black and queer and womxn teacher retention and teacher social and emotional well-being within these intersectionalities. The gap in educational research that this study fills is documentation in research of Black, ratchet, queer, and teacher social and emotional well-being and Hip Hop pedagogy and therapy in the lived experiences of these intersectionality.

### **Study Overview**

Understanding the impact that the above intersectionality has in education and finding social and emotional support for teachers with similar identities is essential for teacher retention. This study aims to enhance educational research by bringing awareness to the experiences of Ratchet, Black, Queer womxn and girls and innovative initiatives supporting their well-being. The proceeding chapters will provide detail of the study. In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, literature pertaining to the above intersectionalities and implementation of culturally relevant mindfulness practices, Hip Hop and Hip Hop therapy. Chapter 2 will further investigate the gaps in research pertaining to the subject matter. Chapter 3 will provide details of the methodology that will be utilized in the study.

### **Definition of Terms and Concepts**

The proceeding section will define key terms that are critical in understanding potential solutions for supporting Black, queer, womxn and girl mental well-being.

**Womxn:** Womanhood and girlhood are terms that transcend beyond just biological gender identification; it is becoming more inclusive of non-traditional “woman” or “feminine”

intersectionalities defined by a patriarchal white supremacist perspective. The term “womxn ” in this investigation means all diverse identities that are inclusive of all intersectionality of womankind; “self-identified” refers to how an individual, not society, reclaims and identifies their gender pronouns and experiences.

**Ratchet/Ratchetness:** a dismissal of respectability, a kind of intuitive understanding of all the ways that respectability as a political project has failed Black women and continues to disallow the access that we have been taught to think it will give (Halliday & Payne, 2020) (McEachern, 2017).

**Black Ratchet Imagination:** According to Stallings (2013), Black Ratchet Imagination is the “ability to unleash post work imagination and antiwork activities that do so much more for gender and sexuality than institutional and political dismissals of hip hop” (p.3) According to Love, Black ratchet imagination “recognizes and affirms the full humanity of Black queer youth for their sexual desires, multiple identities, economic status, style of dress, language, music, and dance; simply stated, a methodological perspective that acknowledges Black queer youth’s precocity (Love, 2017). Using Black Ratchet imaginative spaces create a liberatory creative space to unapologetically express the authentic “ratchet” self that is not defined by the white male gaze.

**Queer:** refers to those who self-identify as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, non-binary, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA+)(Mayo, 2014). **self-identified:** is described as someone having the unrestricted ability to define their own identity, gender identification or rejection thereof, and other characteristics of being without the influence of oppressive regulations. Because the concept of what a womxn or woman should be

beyond just the gender one is born with, the ability to name one's own self-identification of how they identify as a "womxn" is based on personal experiences.

**Social Emotional well-being/wellness/learning(SEL) /mental wellbeing/mental health:**

These terms will be used interchangeably throughout the study. The process that young adults and adults "acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitude to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (CASEL District Resource Center).

**Culturally relevant mindfulness practices/culturally responsive practices/mindfulness:**

activities including, but not limited to, yoga and meditation that are tailored to meet the needs of marginalized groups and provide representation. Both terms will be used interchangeably throughout the investigation.

**Hip Hop Therapy:** Utilizing, listening to or curating Hip Hop music, specifically ratchet music, and/or Hip Hop culture (fashion, dance, media) to support social emotional well-being.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This investigation is rooted in explaining how culturally relevant mindfulness practices and Hip Hop therapy supports mental well-being which can lead to liberatory educational spaces. During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, global widespread anxiety and depression increased by a massive 25% (World Health Organization, 2022). As the Covid-19 pandemic continues to interrupt and reinvent lives three years later, the national and global community are experiencing heightened levels of turmoil, trauma, and mental health concerns. The director of the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, stated, “This is a wake-up call to all countries to pay more attention to mental health and do a better job of supporting their populations’ mental health” (World Health Organization, 2022). In one study conducted on teachers within the United States, the results revealed that 32% of educators (Cohen-Fraade & Donahue, 2021). A study in particular has found that a higher percentage exhibit mental health concerns than the general population. A study of 339 US public school teachers found that 32% displayed symptoms of depression while 13% had suicidal thoughts, this data is notable because it is higher than national rates of 7.4-9.8% (Schonfeld and Bianchi, 2016).

During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, global widespread anxiety and depression increased by a massive 25% (World Health Organization, 2022). Despite the surge in mental health research, there is a lack of data that articulates how mental health plagues the intricate identities of Black and queer and self-identified womxn and girls. Research reveals that women educators face additional stressors within the profession; “experiences with sexism and racism prove detrimental to women’s wellbeing in that they can also lead to greater exposure to

other stressors and reduce coping resources"(Rauscher & Wilson, pg. 3,2017).

Not only are racially marginalized groups experiencing challenges with social and emotional well-being, the mental health of gender and sexuality minorities are being plagued. There is a need to investigate teachers who identify as queer. Adults who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual are more than twice as likely as heterosexual adults to experience a mental health condition; transgender individuals are nearly four times as likely as cisgender individuals or “people whose gender identity corresponds with their birth sex” to experience a mental health condition (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2019). Queer teacher visibility in the classroom is imperative for supporting the unique challenges of queer students; however, that there is a gap in exclusively addressing Black queer educators (May, 2014). From Marsha P. Johnson to Patrisse Cullors, Black queer womxn continue to be activists and advocates in their communities (Davis, 2016). Due to the intersectionality of being a Black, Queer, and/or Womxn within education, external hindrances of race, gender, and societal norms are major stressors that greatly restrict the advancement of mental health in comparison to their white counterparts (Cormier et al., 2021). The proceeding section will provide a narrative that aligns with the literature that will be utilized in this study.

### **Educational Effects- Black Queer Womxn/Girls**

#### **School Climate for Black Queer Womxn/Girls**

The climate of education shifted from in-person learning to remote instruction in March 2020, resulting in a larger gap of academic disparities that worsened pre-existing conditions for all students, especially Black and queer educators and youth. For educators these disparities result in extended stress on the job. In a NEA survey it was reported that 74% of teachers had to cover for a colleague, 80% of teachers also revealed that they took on extra responsibilities due

to the staff shortages, and 55% of teachers are preparing to leave the profession (Jotkoff, 2022). A plethora of research reveals that teachers of color, in particular Black and Latinx experience additional stress that contributes to their job stress that can result in teacher burnout and leaving the field. Teachers of color face race and systemic related stressors as they navigate their educational spaces. One study reveals teachers' perspectives within the workforce and how that impacts work related stress:

Teachers' narratives illustrate that Black, White, and Mexican American women experienced their school contexts in qualitatively different ways. Teachers reveal how their workplaces are organized by perceptions of racial and gender discrimination as well as White racial privilege, influencing their experience of stressors in two ways: (a) through racially specific stressors at work and (b) through racially specific interpretations they attribute to the stressors they experience (Rauscher & Wilson, pr.223,2017).

Black women teachers encounter added layer of work-related stress by feeling as though they had to constantly prove their competence to students, colleagues, administrators, and parents in ways that other colleagues did not have to do, leaving them exhausted, depressed, and distressed (Rauscher & Wilson, pg. 221, 2017). For many Black womxn educators teaching is a fulfillment that goes beyond their personal gratification, "many BWT [Black Women Teachers find teaching a spiritual act of mothering where they feel a duty to enlighten, empower, and protect black students" (Hancock et al., 2020). These teachers take on the challenge of providing care beyond biological limitations as a mother figure. Research reveals that "the emphasis on symbolic or fictive kinships in which individuals assumed responsibility for the care of others they were not biologically related to in order to promote the viability and success of the entire community" (Acosta, 2018).

Black women's expectations that they set forth for themselves or the expectations of the society also adds stressors to live up to the notion of being strong. According to Donovan & West (2014) analysis on the strong Black womxn expectation:

Black women highly endorse the Strong Black Woman (SBW) stereotype—a perception that Black women are naturally strong, resilient, self-contained, and self-sacrificing. This endorsement appears to be a good thing, providing Black women protection against the numerous stressors they must contend with daily. However, anecdotal and qualitative evidence suggests that SBW endorsement limits Black women's ability to cope healthily which exacerbates the negative mental health outcomes of stress (1).

Pandemic related disparities impacting students include access to technology, increased risk of anxiety and stress for queer identifying students, and decreased mental health especially for communities of color and sexual/gender minorities (Goldberg, 2021). Research shows that as a result of the pandemic, 55.3 million students experienced dramatic learning loss and roughly 648,000 high school students dropped out (Metrailler & Clark 2022). Despite the national trend presenting dropouts, statistics reveal that there is a decrease in dropout rates for Black girls from the years of 2010-2022 (National Center of Education Statistics, 2022). Despite this positive trend, there continues to be a disproportionality in disciplinary actions for Black girls, consequently creating an educational environment that infringes on their pathway for academic success.

In Charlotte Mecklenburg County, Black students compose 36% of the student body, but account for a disproportionate number of suspensions (Hill, 2023). Black girls are three times



more likely to be suspended for being disobedient or disrespectful in comparison to white girls (Farinde-Wu et al., 2020; Morris, 2018). Research also expresses that Black girls are sexualized and perceived as adults in school settings for displaying behavior that is not deemed as respectable or docile by subjective standards (Epstein et al., 2017). Black girls are viewed as needing less nurturing, protection, and support; as well as it is assumed that they are knowledgeable in adult topics (Koch & Kozhumam, 2022). This concept of Black girls being victims of adultification can be traced to the result of how Black children were treated as adults; the long-term effects of this treatment can result in a decline in mental health (Koch & Kozhumam, 2022). This disproportionately impacts the trajectory of Black girls desiring to enter the teaching profession, also known as the Black female teacher pipeline (Farinde-Wu et al., 2020).

Alongside racial disparities, gender inequality for students and teachers create another layer of mental turmoil for teachers who identify as Black Queer womxn. Schools have long been institutions that ensure their “employees were normatively gendered, thus exemplifying an unwelcoming school environment” for educators and to students that identify as queer (Mayo, 2014, p. 23). School architecture, policies, and institutional norms all structure an educational world in “which heterosexuality is the only publicity sanctioned identity, thus rejecting anything that opposes the perspective” (Mayo, 2014, p. 21). Mayo (2014) also emphasized lessons and policies in schools that represent the interests of the dominant members of any community with limited representation, as a result minority identities and issues are overlooked and neglected (Mayo, 2014). For queer students, educational facilities have always been centers of concern. During the McCarthy era and proceeding, “schools made great efforts to remove gay and lesbian teachers, or teachers suspected of being gay or lesbian” (p.23). Black girls and Black queer girls

are being wrongfully and harshly reprimanded in schools resulting in them being displaced in alternative schooling, correctional facilities, or dropping out (Morris, 2018). Morris (2008) expanded this by stating that “Black girls are also directly impacted by criminalizing policies and practices that render them vulnerable to abuse, exploitations, dehumanization, and under the worst circumstances death” (p. 2). These limitations lead to Black girls being wrongfully placed in criminal and juvenile justice facilities. Within this population of Black girls, 40% also identify as queer adding another level of discrimination and criminalization (Morrison, 2018).

Black queer experiences of discrimination, rejection, threats, and violence are compounded and can lead to negative mental health outcomes; despite Black queer youth having similar rates of mental health disparities to all Queer youth, they are significantly less likely to receive professional care (The Trevor Project, 2020). There is a gap in research that addresses the importance of teachers that identify as queer or sexual and gender minority. Research reveals that teachers who identify as LGBTIQ+ “...may feel unsafe at work causing upset their wellbeing and destabilize their key psychological traits. Hence, feelings such as insecurity, lack of self-confidence, anxiety, and fear are on loop in their everyday lives” (Guijarro-Ojeda et al., 2021). This evidence reveals the need to support teachers of Black, womxn, and queer intersectionalities. Statistics revealed that 59% of Queer adults and 60% of transgender adults within the queer community are battling poor mental health today.

Queer people are overrepresented at every stage of the criminal justice system, especially within the juvenile’s justice system (Jones, 2021). To better understand and contextualize the professional experiences of Black women educators, it is important to understand that pre-K-12 schools are a reflection and function of a racist and racially hierarchical American society in which schooling has been used to indoctrinate communities of Color into dominant knowledge

systems and control their academic and economic opportunities (Johnson & Kohli, 2020; Tyack, 1974). The realms in which Black queer women and girl intersectionality are being greatly impacted are rooted within America's educational system and consequently are uprooted into the hands of the criminal justice system, especially juvenile correctional facilities (Morris, 2018). There is a demographic and cultural shift in educational realms during a time in which political conditions threaten to suffocate the dreams and aspirations of women, racial/ethnic minorities, the poor and working class, transgender and non-gender conforming people, and immigrants (Evans-Winters, 2019, p.7).

Two million youth are arrested each year and 70% of them have a mental health condition, with the vast majority of numbers being misunderstood and underrepresented Black girls, like me (NAMI, 2019). Black women and girls are eight times more likely to be incarcerated than white women and the state of mental health is worse (Pratt-Clarke, 2012). The following systemic factors contribute to the mental stability of justice-involved Black girls: gender, sexual orientation, poverty, stress, failing educational system, exposure to community and interpersonal violence...prolonged exposure to stress that can lead to hypertension, obesity, anxiety, aggression and depression (Sibinga et al., 2011). Black girls who identify as sexual and gender minority youth (SGMY) or queer are overrepresented in the prison systems (Kahle & Rosenbaum, 2020). The importance of my intersectionalities of being Black, queer, and womxn places me in the positionality of being an advocate and representation for this demographic or students through my cultural and personal experiences. These factors that impact young girls similarly situated as my student are or were factors that contribute to educators who are similarly situated, such as myself. As a collective, Black women and girls face an increase in health disparities and there is a correlation between the accessibility and quality in the health care

system to the trajectory of the prison system (Pratt-Clarke, 2012).

### **Black and Queer Teacher Mental Health**

According to a recent report, 61% of teachers nationwide were often or always stressed at work, which is double compared to non-teaching adults, and 58% of educators have expressed poor mental health due to stress (Mental Health America, 2020). Another recent statistic reveals that one in four teachers have considered quitting in 2020 (Hess, 2021). Teacher retention due to mental health concerns is an alarm trend throughout the teaching realm. Teachers with racial, gender, cultural or other intersectionalities face heightened mental health stressors on the workforce, especially Black teachers. In a study, data revealed that Black teachers were significantly more likely than their White colleagues to report an increase in workload, difficulty doing their job well because of needing to take care of people in the home, a need to take over teaching their own children, and difficulty paying bills (Baker et al., 2021).

Teacher burnout has been a crisis for over 30 years, but the pandemic has created additional stressors as educators adjust to the new normal. Research reveals that 90% of educators feel as though teacher turnout is a serious problem and 91% say that pandemic-related stress is a serious problem (Jotkoff, 2022). Research has also revealed that the level of stress and burnout that teachers experience can result in social and emotional difficulties, lower job performance, high turnover traits, and leaving the profession early (Lee et al., 2023). Black teachers also serve as mentors to their students of color and low-income students which is an additional task in comparison to their white counterparts (Rauscher & Wilson, 2017). Related tasks that require Black teachers to advocate for their students that are similarly situated can add additional stressors on the job. Particularly, Black womxn teachers possess a sense of urgency when analyzing and implementing their teaching, this sense of urgency is linked to their mission-

like focus on pedagogical excellence. (Acosta, 2018). The impact of race relations and self-concept within education greatly impacts teachers of color,” Black women and Latinas report being perceived as incompetent and having to work extra hard to prove their proficiencies and worth (Rauscher & Wilson, p. 2192017).

African Americans experience disproportionate rates of morbidity and mortality in response to stress-related health conditions, including cardiovascular disease, adverse birth outcomes, obesity, and diabetes when compared to their European American counterparts which may be due to their history and socioeconomic position in American society (Woods-Giscombé & Gaylord, 2014). Research also illuminates light on the trend of lack of mental well-being across socioeconomic status, some Black women have reported suffering from depression, but did not seek treatment despite their improved socioeconomic standing, this can be from the lack of trust within in field, time, or putting others before their well-being (Walton, 2021). In the educational realm, Black educators are held to a different emotional standard than their white counterparts. Research reveals that “ Black professionals are held to different sets of emotion rules than their White colleagues in ways that reproduce a culture of racial inequality, such as having to display pleasantness even in the face of hostility and being unable to express frustration (Rauscher & Wilson,pg.221, 2017).The lived experiences of Black, queer, womxn and girls causes stress and hindrances as a result of systemic racism, homophobia, and sexism (Cormier et al., 2021). “African American women have for centuries been raped, mutilated, ignored, ridiculed, demeaned, exploited, and consigned to the statues of inferior,” but despite the inevitable history, Black queer womxn have and continue to be pioneers in the fight for equity for humanity (Merriweather,2015, p.47). Over 7 million Black people in America have reported having a mental illness since the start of the pandemic (Mental Health America,2020). African

Americans experienced disproportionate rates of morbidity and mortality in response to stress-related health conditions, including cardiovascular disease, adverse birth outcomes, obesity, and diabetes when compared to their European American counterparts which may be due to their history and socioeconomic position in American society (Barmore, 2021; Woods-Giscombe & Gaylord, 2014).

### **Mental Implications of Respectability Politics**

Lane (2019) provides a eloquent and needed explanation of how ratchetness equates liberation by stating that “ being ratchet allows for a relinquishing, at least temporarily, of both the norms of Black female respectability and a sense of the always already injured Black female subject” (pg.86). Certain limitations, regulations, and means of operation that govern educational systems are rooted in whiteness, thus causing Black educators to either adjust, assimilate, or defy these standards of respectability. Black womxn educators have the burden of policing their own actions to ensure they are not viewed in a threatening manner, “less ladylike, or even less human-like” (Acosta, 2018). The manner in which Black womxn educators orchestrate their classroom defies gender roles that discredits their womxnhood. Acosta (2018) states that “they reinforce the myth that Black women are more masculine and should automatically fulfill duties that may seem too dangerous for ‘White ladies’ to endure” (Acosta, 2018).

Respectability politics, coined by Eveyln Brooks Higginbotham, was a code of conduct people of color have historically used to maintain a respectable and socially affirming image to counteract the negative stereotypes attributed to them (Higginbotham, 1992; McEachern, 2017). Lane (2019) articulates the positionality of ratchet Black queer womxn by states how they “ skirt the Black heteropatriarchal politics of respectability, BQW[Black Queer Womxn] fall outside of the racialized gender script of proper Black womanhood and are often marginalized Black

cultural and sexual politics as well”(pg.12). According to McEachern (2017), respectability politics are “impossible and violent to Black girls and femmes whose sexualities and existence are most regulated and silenced by them” (McEachern, 2017). Ratchet behavior is about “engaging in ratchet behavior” and “tapping into the subconscious to unleash the power of imagination” (Lane, 2019).

My intersectionalities of being ratchet Black, queer, and womxn defy respectability politics. *Ratchet* is defined as “a cultural knowledge, performance, and awareness of an anti-respectability that can be shared across Black communities and is not bound by geography, social class, or level of traditional education” (McEachern, 2017). In this investigation, the term *queer* will be used to represent all spectrums of the LGBTQIA+ community, which is defined as anyone that self-identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or gender expansive, queer and/or questioning, intersex, asexual, and two-spirit (National Association of Social Workers, 2023). According to research, respectability politics is defined as:

Engaging in behaviors that align with mainstream White, heterosexual, Judeo-Christian, middle class values has long been an adaptive strategy used by Black Americans in an attempt to avoid, or to at least to lessen discrimination and prejudice, ranging from the irritating to the life-threatening in a racialized and racially stratified society such as the United States. (Lee & Hicken, 2016)

The concept of ratchetness defies respectability politics, thus creating and supporting the identities of Black women and girls that are misrepresented in educational research. According to an empirical study that utilized Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) revealed that engaging in ratchet music and ratchet behavior (ex: drinking, being in the club, twerking) allows “for a relinquishing, at least temporarily, of both the norms of Black female respectability and a sense

of the always already injured Black female subject...being ratchet did not require that you feel any particular way: you could just be” (Lane, p.86,2019). The importance of making space for ourselves as Black queer women is essential in our existence and making sense of the world around us. McEachern(2017) stated that “ratchet provides the space for Black folks— women and femmes especially—to undermine the white male gaze and explore presentations of self with which they truly feel comfortable” (McEachern, 2017). Creating a safe space that allows for this liberation and can reduce stressors prompted by systemic racism within education. Ratchet is the embodiment of Black femme liberatory consciousness. Ratchet is defined in this study as “cultural knowledge, performance, and awareness of an anti-respectability " through Hip Hop influence (McEachern, 2017). My identity of being ratchet is heavily influenced by Hip Hop music and culture as expressed in *When Chickenheads Come to Roost* by Joan Morgan (Morgan, 1999).

### **Intersectionality and Racial Battle Fatigue**

The need to retain educators who identify with the intersectionality of being ratchet, Black, queer, and womxn is imperative for the academic environment and should be focused on social and emotional well-being of marginalized students that share these identities. Research illustrates that Black teachers, especially Black womxn educators undergo the extra task of being the support for their Black youth. Acosta (2018) states that:

The educators perceived that they were set up in their schools to serve as a Black superhero in ways similar to the image of the Black mammy [Black matriarch]. They believed they were expected to nurture their colleagues by taking on their instructional responsibilities in addition to their own. They shared that it became expected that all the “unruly” (i.e., African American children) be sent to them



when other teachers, particularly White women, were unsuccessful with them.

Black, Queer, and/or self-identified womxn within education endure added layers of complexity and mental turmoil due to the sexism, homophobia, and racism as layers of historical systemic oppression. As a proud Black ratchet queer womxn, I have experienced the mental impact that the pandemic and systemic oppression have placed upon educators in public schools, especially those with the intersectionality of being Black, Queer, and self-identified women (Crenshaw, 1991). The theory of intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, addresses how race and gender are major factors in the realities of Black women. American educational systems are centered around Eurocentric patriarchal heteronormative standards that deny that race and gender play major factors in education (Asante, 1980; Walton et al., 2021). This fact profoundly gauges the need for research to investigate social and emotional well-being of students and teachers of diverse identities. Black educators are encountering *racial battle fatigue* (RBF) as a result of having to fulfill extended roles in education. “Growing literature suggests that stress-related diseases result from the fact that African Americans have to keep activated a psychological and physiological response system, originally evolved for responding to acute physical emergencies. For many Blacks, this system is now “switched on” constantly to cope with chronic racial microaggressions” (Smith et al., 2007).

There must be more research added to the field of education that illuminates the existence of Ratchet, Black, queer, womxn educators and how we impact our education spaces. Within intersectionality, there is a rejection of the racial and gender limitations placed in whitewashed American society (Johnson & Kohli, 2020; Lee & Thomas, 2022). This phenomenon is defined as *respectability politics*, which is a code of conduct people of color have historically used to maintain a respectable and socially affirming image to counteract the negative stereotypes

attributed to them (Higginbotham, 1992). Those who identify with intersectionality in this study defy respectability politics by navigating the world as their authentic ratchet selves as a form of social and emotional liberation from oppressive restrictions. These restrictions within respectability politics is the overarching cause of other systemic limitations and biases that impact social and emotional well-being of marginalized educators (McEachern, 2017). Because the American standard resides in the gauze of white male patriarchy, anything that defies those identities encounters more challenging obstacles that negatively impact mental well-being. Thus, creating expressive and unapologetic Black ratchet imaginative spaces for educators for liberation and to support social and emotional well-being. The critical problem in this study is Black teacher retention and limited social and emotional support for Black, queer, womxn/girls in education. This research will offer insight on the impact of culturally relevant mindfulness practices and Hip Hop therapy have on my social and emotional well-being as a ratchet, queer, Black, woman educator.

### **Barriers of Culturally Relevant Practices**

#### **Teacher SEL**

A recent report revealed that addressing mental health and social and emotional needs of teachers of color, especially Black and Brown educators, are multilayered, thus resulting in a lack of research on the topic (Cormier et al., 2021). Defining teacher SEL is complex, but one study defines it as, “the capacity to manage feelings related to stress exhaustion. This operational definition aligns with much of the empirical literature in teachers’ well-being that focuses on the absence of stress and burnout (Split et al., 2011) (Tarissa Hidajat et al., 2023).” Teacher SEL can be measured by how they are fulfilled in the following categories: connections, control and capacity; as well as overall job satisfaction. The terms are defined as such: connection is

described as having a bond or interaction to others, control is having a sense of “autonomy” in connection with feelings of competence or self-efficacy, and capacity is one’s capability to handle stressors and challenges (Lee et al., 2023). According to research rooted in analyzing teacher SEL, it is stated that teachers with high social and emotional competence are more self-aware compared to their colleagues. Research states that:

They recognize their own emotions, they’re able to use their emotions positively to motivate others to learn, and they understand their own capacities and emotional strengths and weaknesses particularly well. They’re also socially aware—they recognize and understand others’ emotions, including those of their students and colleagues, and they work to build strong, supportive relationships. And they’re culturally aware their understanding that others’ perspectives may differ from their own helps them negotiate positive solutions to conflicts. (Schonert-Reichl, p.143, 2017)

Initiatives supporting teacher SEL must be done beyond in-school or district wide suggestions, it must be transferable and accessible for educators. Research reveals that using mindfulness initiatives have proven to help reduce stress levels and burn out due to the ability to regulate their emotions(Schonert-Reichl, 2017). The concept of mindfulness will be addressed more extensively in the proceeding text. More research is needed to address specifically how these initiatives support Black queer educator populations. School districts have been providing more resources for educators such as offering a few self-care tips, strategies for implementing exercise, sleep, and managing stress at a surface level, but there are still gaps within those resources (Jotkoff, 2022).

There is a growing need to investigate the initiatives provided for teachers that ensure their mental well-being is prioritized. According to Woods-Giscombée (201) the reduction of

stressors through implementation requires “understanding the cultural, social, historical, environmental, and psychological forces that influence the target health behavior in the proposed target population” (Woods-Giscombé & Gaylord, 2014). In one study that investigates teachers SEL it revealed that “Teachers with high social and emotional competence also demonstrate prosocial values—they have deep respect for their colleagues, students, and students’ families, and they care about how their own decisions affect the wellbeing of others. Finally, such teachers possess strong self-management skills” (Schonert-Reichl, P. 7 2017).

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is defined as the expansion of competencies or skills related to the awareness and management of emotions and relationships and highlights needed skills to address challenges (Flushman et al., 2021). The Collaborative Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) created the SEL framework which comprises the following 5 competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible-decision-making (CASEL,2013). SEL initiatives in place within educational institutions, such as CASEL and 7 Mindsets curriculum provided by school districts are being implemented for educational stakeholders to use to support students' mental well-being and community building. Research reveals the potential harm in implementing SEL within teacher preparation programs and the classroom by stating that from a culturally responsive lens, SEL could perpetuate inequities with cultural norms and needs to affirm strengths, values, cultures, and lived experiences from diverse cultural backgrounds (Flushman et al., 2021).

CASEL defined SEL as the process that young adults and adults “acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitude to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. Research reveals that the

SEL of teachers is “imperative and when effectively implemented it can reduce stress, burnout, improve job satisfaction, and enhance teachers’ ability to support the SEL of their students” (Flushman et al., p.3, 2021).

According to the U.S Department of Education, since the start of the pandemic, the Biden-Harris Administration has taken significant action to address the mental and social emotional health needs of Americans, and the President's Build Back Better agenda includes funding and support for a wide range of programs aimed at improving access to mental health services for students (U.S Department of Education, 2021). On the contrary, there are initiatives in various states, including North Carolina, that are hoping to increase free mental health and behavior health training and support for staff (Leshner & Malbrough, 2022). A study from the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence discovered that teachers who were mandated to teach social and emotional learning but did not cultivate their own practice worsened their students' social and emotional learning skills (Woolf, 2020). Although school leaders are trying to bring forth more SEL initiatives to support teacher well-being there is a need for interventions to target specifically teacher burnout, vicarious trauma, being adequately trained to cope with trauma which can lead to “low work performance and increase the likelihood of mental illness, such as burnout, depression, and anxiety” (Costardi et al., 2023). There is also a need for research to deeply analyze the impact of specific interventions on teacher burnout and other teacher related stressors. In another study focusing on teacher SEL, the most effective interventions contribute to an increase of teacher’s sense of personal accomplishment, confidence self-efficacy, burnout, and ability to cope and respond to extended job demands (Oliveira et al., 2021).

### **Need for Culturally Relevant SEL**

There is becoming a need for appealing culturally relevant social and emotional support

that counters the stressors caused by patriarchal, heteronormative, Eurocentric ideals within education sectors and real-world sectors in Black, queer, womxn occupations. Studies expose the gap in research that investigates culturally responsive practices for supporting mental well-being; “Culturally relevant adaptations have been largely non-existent, with few exceptions' '(Watson-Singleton et al., 2019). It is also evident that there is a void in research that evaluates culturally responsive mindfulness practices that address cultural values and backgrounds of diverse communities, in comparison to mindfulness practices being used to address treatment concerns, such as substance abuse (Watson-Singleton et al., 2019). A teacher's social and emotional well-being shapes the relationships and environment they create for their students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

With the above limitations and stressors, there is a need to cultivate SEL programs that allow teachers and school leadership to create spaces for teachers and school leaders to engage in cultural analysis that include the development of sociopolitical consciousness (Mahfouz & Anthony-Stevens, 2020). In a study with first graders, research revealed that teachers with high levels of stress result in an increase in students with mental health concerns (Milkie & Warner, 2011). Teacher social emotional well-being is “often considered one of the areas most neglected,” but teacher voice and input was perceived as an effect for supporting teacher’s implementation of SEL (De Klerk et al., 2021). A quantitative study that analyzed the impact of teachers' attitudes on the implementation of SEL in their classrooms revealed that educators who invested in SEL initiatives, including self-care, minimized the effects of vicarious traumatization (Kim et al., 2021).

### **Culturally Relevant Mindfulness Practices**

Culturally relevant mindfulness practices for Black women are becoming more relevant

in research. In this investigation, culturally relevant mindfulness practices include yoga, meditation, and utilizing Hip Hop therapy. An investigation that researched interventions that support teacher SEL revealed that out of the 29 studies, 18 of those indicated that teachers who practices mindfulness interventions like meditation and yoga produces improved emotional regulation in dealing with negative situations, lower levels of stress and burnout, outcomes for well-being in supporting teacher SEL (Tarissa Hidajat et al., 2023). Blacks with previous experiences in mindfulness practices articulated the need for culturally relevant adaptations to increase participation amongst the community (Watson-Singleton et al., 2019). In a research study that collected data for a four-week time frame with Black women, they wanted to investigate recommended modifications to enhance cultural responsiveness of the practices. The results revealed the following culturally relevant modifications: include African American facilitators, incorporate salient cultural values into the practice (including self-empowerment, self-care to better support self and others, storytelling to allow a place to express throughout the intervention, use culturally familiar terminology, provide culturally tailored resources (Watson-Singleton et al., 2019).

### **Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction**

Although mindfulness practices have been utilized in research within education, there is still a need in specifically analyzing mindfulness practices for teachers of color. Mindfulness based interventions have been used to promote psychological well-being in occupations including teachers, police officers, nurses, physicians, and social workers; and results in which these initiatives were used for teachers to manage stress resulted in improved teaching practices, enhanced relationships with students, develop skills to increase emotional awareness and regulate responses in stressful situations. (Tarissa Hidajat et al., 2023). With

Black womxn teachers stress levels leading to burn out being heighten as a result of teaching in a post-pandemic classroom, requires an intentional scope to find and implement supports such as Mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) interventions/ Mindfulness based Interventions (MBI).

Mindfulness based stress reduction is becoming more popular among people of color during the pandemic. Research illuminates the benefits of MBI practices for Black womxn which include the reduction of addiction, lowering anxiety, and improved blood pressure (Watson-Singleton et al., 2019). Finding inclusive mindfulness spaces for Black, Queer, Womxn, although progressive, is still saturated within Whiteness. Culturally relevant or responsive mindfulness practices/interventions are culturally tailored to address the unique health needs of African Americans (Watson-Singleton et al., p2, 2019). Mindfulness practices and meditation “derive out of indigenous African Cultures...upon enslavement and colonization, European and Arabic rulers forbade Africans to practice these ancient religious and cultural traditions”(Evans-Winters, p.2, 2020) Rose Black (2017)stated in one interview that “spaces where mindfulness initiatives were taking place were just an extension of the racial aggression and isolation I felt at-large, except worse” (p. 9). African Americans experience a disproportionate rate of stress-related health conditions compared to European Americans. Mindfulness meditation has been shown to be effective for managing stress and various stress-related health conditions (Woods-Giscombé & Gaylord, 2014). In the study with women of color with HIV, participants revealed the need for content to be tailored to their physical ability and include more relatable and culturally relevant terminology and content (Kerrigan et al., 2021).

Evidence reveals the many benefits of mindfulness practices on mental well-being for both students and teachers, and it is even suggested for teachers to combat stress and burn out



(Mahfouz & Anthony-Stevens, 2020). As mental health is gaining interest in research, parallel interest is being directed toward the use of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) practices to alleviate the pandemic related stress from a global perspective. MBSR practices including meditation, deep-breathing, and yoga are proven to be an effective holistic addition to supporting mental health and overall well-being (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). The term “mindfulness” in its simplest form is defined as “being aware of the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Mindfulness based stress reduction practices were curated in 1979 by Kabat-Zinn to assist individuals with chronic pain, illness, and stress. Traditional MBSR programs were rooted in seven foundational attitudes, and it was recommended that participants take at least one 2.5-hour class for eight weeks. The seven foundational attitudes are as follows: (a) non judgment of one’s experiences, (b) patience with allowing experiences to unfold in their own time, (c) willingness to see everything as if for the first time, (d) being oneself, (e) non striving, (f) acceptance of how things are, and (g) allowing one’s thoughts to come and go uncensored (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Watson-Singleton et al., 2019; Woods-Giscombé & Gaylord, 2014).

Historically, mindfulness practices have centered around whiteness and white culture. Despite the lack of diversity, the benefits of mindfulness interventions for womxn of color have shown promise. MBSR practices have reduced addiction and can treat biological, psychological, and behavioral processes involved in stress-related disparities among African Americans. Yellowbird (2020) emphasized the importance of non-westernized mindfulness practices, stating:

It is important to engage in decolonized mindfulness practices that help develop the insight to confront and subvert systemic racism and white supremacy. It is crucial to challenge the colonized western beliefs and values that support changing the person to fit society rather than changing society to fit all individuals. Indeed, mindfulness practitioner

and law professor Rhonda Magee says that western mindfulness has not prepared us to confront racism, sexism, and all the other isms because of our “hyper-focus on individualism. (Yellow Bird et al., 2020)

Hip Hop centered mindfulness practices are emerging as the rise of the genre’s popularity has entered the realms of social and emotional support for adults, in particular for Black Womxn while simultaneously combating whiteness within the field of mindfulness. Research explains that simply listening to particular Hip Hop music has therapeutic benefits, “listening to rap music can trigger a profound response that stimulates a powerful and insightful discussion about their personal narratives— stories filled with pain, loss, grief, and joy” (Hadley & Yancy,p.34, 2012). An example of the visibility of Hip Hop culture being infused with mindfulness practices or mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) or mindfulness-based initiatives (MBI) is trap yoga, which uses the Hip Hop genre called trap music with traditional yoga practices (Trap Yoga Bae). Another example is the use of “twerking,” an expressive form of dance with African ancestral roots,” that has been catching popularity globally as a form of therapy (Freeman-Haskin, 2020). Trap music and “twerking” compose “ratchet aesthetics,” which is defined in this research as embodying the positive attributes of ratchetness, which include confidence, demanding presence, eccentricity, and boldness in expression. Despite research revealing the benefits and the effectiveness of Hip Hop therapy and mindfulness practices for youth, as well as the rise in popularity of Hip Hop centered mindfulness practices, there continues to be a gap in evaluating the implementation of these initiatives on adults, especially Black Queer womxn.

## **Hip Hop Therapy**

Hip Hop therapy is a culturally responsive school counseling framework grounded in established counseling theories (cognitive behavioral therapy, person-centered therapy) that include interventions through the process of writing, recording, and performing hip-hop music (Levy, 2012; Levy & Keum, 2014). Hip Hop therapy, created and coined by Dr. Edgar Tyson, is an “innovative synergy of rap music, bibliotherapy, and music therapy” that yields positive therapeutic outcomes among adolescent youth (Tyson, 2002). Hip Hop therapy is also categorized as a type of music therapy, “using hip hop to treat psychopathology is aligned with the discipline of music therapy. In music therapy, a therapist systematically uses music experiences (e.g., listening to music) to facilitate therapeutic discussions about topics such as emotions, memories, and identity issues”(Robinson et al., pg.4,2017). In this investigation, Hip Hop therapy functions heavily as music therapy because I find healing in listening to Hip Hop music and participating in Hip Hop centered verve activities, such as dancing. Despite the rise in interest for Hip Hop therapy, there is a gap in research that investigates the impact of the practice on adults.

The use of hip hop music as therapy through the form of literacy, creative expression, and clinical therapy are centered and framed in culturally relevant practices that are cornerstones in best practices for cultivating the whole individual while using culture (Ladson-Billings,2014). As the Covid-19 pandemic continues, the emphasis for Black Queer women to seek refuge in therapy and holistic mental health remedies are growing in popularity on social media. Hip Hop icons, including Jay-Z, Drake, and Kendrick Lamar are advocates of meditation and mindfulness practice (Pompliano, 2022). On April 21, 2016, Hip Hop scholars from diverse professions signed the 10th Element of Hip Hop Health & Wellness Proclamation, which embeds wellness,

veganism, and mindfulness in the culture and practices of Hip Hop (Hip Hop Is Green, 2016).

Utilized in the field of education and psychology, Hip Hop Therapy (HHT) is a research-based initiative that supports the social and emotional well-being of “at-risk” Black and Brown youth, which was originally introduced in the field of educational research by Dr. Edgar Tyson (Tyson & J.C, 2018). Elements of Hip Hop therapy include but are not limited to lyric writing as cognitive and emotive journaling, collaboration as role-playing, and Hip Hop performance to improve group dynamics. HHT is categorized as a form of expressive arts therapy which allows participants to self-discover by incorporating music, poetry, dance, art and other forms of artistic expression defined as a groundbreaking combination of rap music, bibliotherapy, and music therapy (Tyson,2011; Winfrey,2011).

The following factors contribute to the need for HHT and mindfulness curriculum: poverty, stress, failing educational system, exposure to community and interpersonal violence, prolonged exposure to stress that can lead to hypertension, obesity, anxiety, aggression and depression (Sibinga et al.,2011). These components can be integrated in the classroom to provide accessible SEL. A research-based Hip Hop therapy curriculum curated by Dr. Adia Winfrey, entitled H.Y.P.E or Healing People Thru Empowerment, has proven to promote self-efficacy and mental health support for at-risk youth that can be transferred for adults (Winfrey, 2019). Hip Hop therapy (HHT) is a contribution of hip-hop music, narratives, and the arts, which are rooted in hip-hop pedagogy and culture (Tyson et al., 2018).

HHT aims to merge mental health initiatives and culturally relevant concepts in Hip Hop to build a sense of identity and cognitive support to help with emotional development (Tyson et al., 2018). The H.Y.P.E program created by Dr. Adia Winfrey for Black adolescent males resulted in 77% of teens who participated experiencing a better outlook on goal setting and self-

concept, and 61% concluded that H.Y.P.E improved their self-control, and improved mental health (Winfrey, 2018). The following benefits of the H.Y.P.E program are as follows: increased cognitive functioning, increased self-esteem, improvements in emotional intelligence; increased feeling of well-being; reduction in behavioral problems; decreased anxiety; decrease in blood pressure and heart rate; improvements in sleep behavior; increased internal locus of control and improved school climate;” as well as reduce behaviors associated with attention deficit hypertension disorder(ADHD)(Gould et al., 2012). The cornerstone of Hip Hop therapy is utilizing elements of Hip Hop, including dance, music, writing, and other kinesthetic activities to provide mental relief and release. With the combination of both Hip Hop and mindfulness, this study hopes to support the use of merging both practices to provide social and emotional support for Hip Hop pedagogists and enthusiasts. Researchers of music and art therapy expose the benefits of the genre. Hadley & Yancy (2012) states the following:

Rap and Hip-Hop are powerful contemporary cultural forms that have within them expressive modalities that invite and encourage exploration of the inner self, its weaknesses and strengths. Rap and Hip-Hop provide spaces that free up ways of expressing the self and of acquiring new, positive, and effective ways of being empowered (p.34).

The research future elaborates how the genre can be utilized for therapeutic benefits by revealing that rap and Hip-Hop can be used in therapy— by listening and discussing, performing, creating, or improvising (Hadley & Yancy,2012).

### **Ratchetness as Liberation**

The concept of *ratchetness* has taken on multiple connotations towards Black women behavior but has been integrated into educational research to examine the positionality of women

within Hip Hop/rap music and culture (Stallings, 2014). The idea of *ratchetness* was originally introduced in Hip Hop music and vernacular to mean something or someone that is “ghetto,” “hood,” an unruly and promiscuous woman or to describe having an enjoyable time being unapologetically the embodiment of Hip Hop (Cooper, 2012). Ratchetness emerged into educational spaces through the emerging works of academic scholars and Hip Hop pedagogists. Ratchet is defined as cultural knowledge and performance that allow Black girls and femmes to evade the dejectedness of respectability by maneuvering through oppression via creativity in expression (Miles, 2020). Despite the recent shift in the connotation of the term and identity, a negative perspective of ratchet still lingers.

Ratchet is often used to describe a Black person who embodies the negative stereotypes of Black socioeconomically disadvantaged people (Emdin, 2019). Some characteristics of *ratchetness* may be perceived by others in the education as unorthodox to *acceptability*. *Ratchet* identities are heavily influenced by Hip Hop culture and ideologies. Emdin (2021) describes how *ratchet educators*, or *ratchedemic educators*, create a liberatory space within their classroom as an organic space to decompress from White normative standards in education and society. As defined by Emdin (2021), a *ratchedemic educator* acts in their most authentic self in the pursuit and expression of knowledge and pushing boundaries to provide voice and reflect the needs of those with their experiences that lack power (Emdin, 2021). By Ratchet Black Queer womxn educators being the embodiment of surviving and thriving in oppressive spaces as their organic selves, social and emotional well-being is negatively impacted. Teachers experience what is identified as vicarious trauma because they are constantly exposed to diverse students with a plethora of backgrounds and traumas. Vicarious trauma is differentiated from other forms of trauma reactions because with vicarious trauma, an individual indirectly experiences another

person's trauma (Robinson, 2022). As a result, it is necessary to analyze the experiences of this demographic of teachers in order to retain educators who ethnically match Ratchet, Black queer students.

“Symbolically, we are the lions striving not to starve from our isolated existence, and we are gazelles running from our predators whose goal is to seek and destroy us”; thus, self-preservation through my intersectionality of being ratchet is in essence my way of staying alive and reaching liberation (Merriweather, 2015). According to McEachern (2017), the identity of being ratchet is a response to defying the respectable gauze:

Ratchet is that dis respectability politics, and it brings our emotional selves to the current moment. It is the liberatory consciousness that equips Black girls and femmes with the knowledge and skills to get free and heal. This freedom and healing is why ratchet is particularly necessary for Black girls and femmes who navigate multiple oppressive systems simultaneously.

Researchers in education, including Tricia Rose, Bettina Love, L.H Stallings, and other contemporary researchers and theorists continue to address the gap in research that focuses on ratchetness as a mode of redefining femininity and normalcy or a form of free expression for students or young womxn. In this study, both concepts will be used interchangeably. There is also a void in educational research pertaining to “ratchet” Hip Hop enthusiasts and/or the use of “ratchet” Hip Hop in academia and genre, despite the rise in Hip Hop pedagogy. The term “ratchet” as described in Bettina Love's (2017) article *A Ratchet Lens: Black Queer Youth, Agency, Hip Hop, and the Black Ratchet Imagination*, is a complex word with no definite meaning that contains both positive and negative connotations. On the other hand, the positive connotation of the word is rooted in Black feminine aesthetics that oppose conservative White

Supremist norms (Love, 2017). An expressive space for educational stakeholders to be around like-minded individuals possess significant meaning for Black Queer womxn in education. Research reveals that Black aesthetic performance is a form of liberation by “serving as a site where the Black subject has asserted their personhood, not by not focusing on disproving white assumptions about Black subjectivity” (Miles, 2020).

Bettina Love and Chris Emdin have recently introduced the concept of ratchetness into the classroom. Love declares “ratchetness” a state of Black Queer students finding their own unapologetic expressive space. Emdin(2021) uses the term “ratchademic” to describe the merging of one’s unapologetic Hip Hop self being able to express in an academic setting and the loud and vivacious spirit is a part of call and response culture integrated in the Black church. Dictionary.com defines the term “ratchet” as:

A slang term that can mean “exciting” or “excellent,” often used as a term of empowerment among women. Some may also use *ratchet* for when they are feeling “bad” in some way.

The term has been previously used, however, as an insult characterizing a womxn as being “over dramatic” or “promiscuous” (Dictionary.com, 2019). Like previously stated, the term “ratchet” identity often carries a negative connotation that is utilized to describe the demeanor of Black students, especially Black girls, yet Black girls grow up to be Black womxn that are stigmatized and silenced because they do not fit the mold of White patriarchal concepts of what is socially acceptable behavior. The question then arises: what and how can educational realms support the mental well-being of Black Queer Ratchet educators that were once Black queer ratchet girls?

The notion of *respectability politics* demeans various cultural norms and behaviors



furthest from white normality as unprofessional or a behavior concern (Dazey, 2021; Higginbotham, 1993). Respectability politics is exemplified when Black girls are being criminalized and wrongfully punished due to their behavior or actions being viewed as disrespectful to teachers that do not understand their form of liberation (Morris, 2018). Although there is an emphasis on ratchet identity being evaluated in Black youth and girls, there is a gap in research that highlights the experiences of cultural and ethnic matching for ratchet, Black, queer, womxn educators that were once those little ratchet girls. In a recent study, evidence revealed that Black teachers perceived the following about their workload:

... as having “lower-level courses, more challenging students, and less support from administrators than their White colleagues. Black teachers also reported the need to consistently prove their competence to students, colleagues, administrators, and parents in ways that other colleagues did not have to do, leaving them exhausted, depressed, and distressed (Rauscher & Wilson, 2017).

In conclusion, there are many barriers that prohibit Black ratchet queer womxn to obtain the mental health support needed to combat respectability politics heightened by the pandemic. This investigation hopes to provide insight into Implications of these intersectionalities and the stressors that impact social emotional wellness.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The context of this chapter describes the methodological process utilized in this investigation. This chapter provides insight on the following: research design, participant, data collection, data analysis, and limitations.

#### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative autoethnographic examination was to evaluate how educational and personal stressors impact me as a Black ratchet queer educator, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of culturally relevant SEL in combating respectability politics. This autoethnographic study explored the impact that culturally relevant mindfulness practices and Hip Hop therapy have on my social and emotional well-being as a ratchet Black Queer womxn educator. The study informs research on the mental impact of lived experiences of educators with similarly situated intersectionalities.

The overall intention of this study was to bring forth research on the mental well-being of queer Black womxn and girls in education and how to support my intersectionalities that negates respectability politics through Black ratchet imaginative spaces using elements of Hip Hop therapy.

#### **Research Questions**

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. How do my intersectionalities of being ratchet Black, Queer, and Womxn impact my social and emotional well-being as an educator?
2. In what ways do culturally relevant practices and elements of Hip Hop therapy support the social and emotional well-being of my intersectionalities in combating respectability politics as an educator?

3. How have culturally relevant mindfulness practices and Hip Hop therapy led to liberatory educational space?

### **Methodology**

The purpose of qualitative research was to gather the lived experience of my realities as a subject in an effort to bring awareness and narrative to fill the gap that is inclusive of Black queer perspectives in education. Qualitative research uses methods of gathering observational, communicative (natural discourse or interview), or documentary (artifactual) data derived from natural settings. Qualitative research investigates data using detailed descriptive analysis from various forms of written or oral text. Qualitative research allows for interpretation of perspectives and experiences. Qualitative researchers analyze their data in non-mathematical ways to easily understand the world on its own terms (Riehl, 2001). The proceeding sections provide a deeper understanding of autoethnographic research which was used in this investigation. The data collection methods served as a healing process by embedding mindfulness practices and Hip Hop Therapy. Hip Hop therapy focuses on creating a poem, rap, song, painting, or any other kind of art form for expression and healing. In this investigation, I did not create an artform which is typical in Hip Hop Therapy; the premise of the study was to curate habits that foster healthy social emotional wellness.

Ethnography is “the study of groups and people as they go about their everyday lives” (Joffe et al., 1996, p.4) Ethnography is the foundation of autoethnography (AE) with the purpose to study a culture's “relational practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences for the purpose of helping insiders (cultural members) and outsiders (cultural strangers) better understand a culture” by being participant observers in the field (Ellis & Bochner, 2006).

In autoethnography, the experiences are centered around oneself as the participant. Autoethnographers analyze their personal narratives in order to create narratives that lead to an enriched understanding about individuals who share similar culture and/or experiences. The purpose of an autoethnography is to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 2). In autoethnographic research, the researcher is a full member in the research group or setting, visible in current research, and committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena (Anderson, 2006). Autoethnography seeks to evaluate, explain, and systematically analyze personal experiences to better understand cultural experiences (Ellis et al., 2011). Duncan (2004) stated that ethnographers and autoethnographers are more than just storytellers; they provide reports that are scholarly and justifiable interpretations based on multiple sources of evidence. This means autoethnographic accounts do not consist solely of the researcher's opinions but are also supported by other data that can confirm or triangulate those opinions (Duncan, 2004, p. 28).

Some methods of data collection for autoethnographic studies include "participant observation, reflective writing, interviewing, and gathering documents and artifacts" (Duncan, 2004, p. 31). According to Ellis (2011), data stems from the researchers' revelation or epiphanies:

When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity. However, in addition to telling about experiences, autoethnography often is required by social science publishing conventions to analyze these experiences. (Ellis et al., 2011)

Autoethnography is defined as research design that places the researcher at the core of cultural analysis; Chang (2008) stated that autoethnography “transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation” (p.43). There are three forms or writing styles of autoethnography: confessional/self-critical, descriptive/self-affirmative, and analytical/interpretive. Confessional or self-critical tends to expose “self-inequities, problems, or troubles” (Chang, 2008, p. 41) with the intention to learn more about the self. Descriptive or self-affirmative autoethnography can be closely related to stories that are literary memoirs. Finally, analytic autoethnography is described as research that views narratives as content to analyze.

My choice of autoethnographic research was analytic autoethnography because it allowed the researcher to investigate their realities to bring new insight to similarly situated phenomena. Anderson (2006) described the five key features of analytic autoethnography as the following: “(1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis” (Anderson, 2006, p.378). There are two types of CMS in autoethnographic research, “opportunistic” and “covert.” Opportunistic CMRs are the most common and can be born may be born into a group, placed into a group due to various circumstances or grow familiar with in or to a group; on the other hand, covert CMRs starts as “purely data-oriented research interest in the setting but become converted to complete immersion and membership during the course of the research” (Anderson, 2006, p.379). In this investigation, I am considered an opportunistic CMR because I was born into my Blackness and my gender identity, which influenced my experiences in my environment thus impacting my identity as ratchet. Anderson (2006) explained that analytical reflexivity is “self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others through examining one’s actions and perceptions' ” (p.

384). Narrative Visibility of the researcher's self is described as the researcher being fully emerged in the environment or group that they are studying. In autoethnographic research, it is critical for the researcher to gather data from informants outside of self, thus including dialogue with informants beyond the self is essential for gaining diverse perspectives on the subject. The final feature of autoethnographic research is having a commitment to theoretical analysis by utilizing empirical data to gain insight into a larger phenomenon (Anderson, 2006).

### **Research Design**

This analytical autoethnography helped to illuminate the impact that culturally relevant mindfulness practices and HHT support my social emotional wellness leading to creating liberatory educational spaces. This investigation provided insight on factors that impacted well-being for me as a ratchet Black queer womxn educator, which provided insight into perspectives from individuals with similarly situated identities, as well as co-conspirators that are advocates.

### **Participant**

This study was rooted in my lived experiences as a 35-year-old, ratchet, Black, self-identified cisgendered queer womxn teacher of 9th grade English. I want to make aware of my privilege as being cisgendered and in a supportive professional and personal space where I can be my authentic self; this is unfortunately not the reality of many Black queer womxn, people, and educators that are similarly situated. Thus, showing how there are correlations between those within a supportive environment and those educators that are in need of their community. I have been in the field of education for 15 years and worked or volunteered in the classroom, correctional institutions, queer youth centers, and local and global Black and Brown communities. With counselors being overwhelmed and overloaded and in-school therapists and psychologists' unreliable schedules, I found myself in the unique position where I took the

initiative of being one of two Black women who organized the social and emotional initiative for staff and students in our school. These intersectionalities are critical identities because they include limitations and privileges that I am able to maneuver within the various identities. My identities also play a factor in how myself and others with similar identities impact our mental well-being while navigating racism, sexism, and Eurocentric ideologies of acceptability.

As a Hip Hop pedagogist, I utilize components of Hip Hop therapy and Hip Hop pedagogy throughout my lessons to support the social and emotional well-being of my students, as well as bring awareness to social issues that affect their overall well-being. I also notice and embody the essence of Hip Hop culture within my class by using the genre as a median to bridge the relevance between content and culture to provide culturally relevant lessons. I am certified to implement H.Y.P.E Hip Hop therapy sessions, mental health first aid, as well as being a certified 200 hour yoga and SEL instructor through Breath for Change. Currently, I am curating a Hip Hop therapy and Buddhism journal with therapist Caroline Korbin, who wrote alongside Dr. Edgar Tyson, the curator of Hip Hop therapy. My experiences are appropriate for data analysis because I identify with multiple underrepresented categories in educational research: Black womxn, queer, and ratchet. I am in a unique position as the SEL coordinator of my school, Gay Straight Alliance advisor, and “Teacher of the Year” recipient. My positionalities place the responsibility of supporting the mental well-being of students and colleagues at the forefront of my career. With emphasis on supporting the social and emotional well-being of others, this research allows me to gain a deeper perspective of how research-based culturally relevant practices support my well-being and inform my educational spaces. There is a gap in research that focuses on social and emotional well-being of Black queer womxn educators, as well as implementations to support diverse needs.

In times of great stress and mental turmoil, I have utilized Hip Hop music, especially more “commercialized” or “mainstream” Hip Hop that contains “ratchet” esthetics, as a tool to support my social and emotional well-being. The rawness and unapologetic bold personality of womxn rappers who embody ratchetness also embody liberation from restraints. As an educator, I am often restrained and confined to fitting a stiff mold of society's concept of a teacher: white, heterosexual, woman, and respectable. On the contrary, rappers such as Megan Thee Stallion, Big Latto, Saucey Santa, Glo-Rilla, City Girls, and Cardi B break down barriers by infiltrating spaces that are normally perceived as predominantly white or male. I also find liberation in the most misogynistic of rappers, Future, because he tells stories of wealth and companionship of a bachelor, a liberatory perspective that is anything but the norm. Hip Hop music in general has provided my students and me with an outlet for releasing stress, coping with trauma and building confidence.

Hip Hop artists from legends such as Nipsey Hussle and DMX to more ratchet and trap beats like Megan Thee Stallion, Future, and countless others have been on repeat during this immensely mentally stressful two years of the pandemic. I have had positive confidence boosting self-talks and affirmations in which I quote the ratchet lyrics of artists like City Girls and Big Latto before my first block class or a major event that brings forth anxiety. Hip Hop is not just music; it is therapy, salvation, and at times religion for Hip Hop enthusiasts. Hip Hop centered shows such as *Love and Hip Hop* and *P-Valley* were my “go to” shows during times of depression that encouraged me to come out of my norm, and take risks to boost my confidence or mood while engaging in Hip Hop centered activities, like “twerk” classes and pole fitness. These activities allowed me to come out of my normalcy and routine to embrace an alter ego that is my complete opposite. After expressing to a few close colleagues, friends, and family the



benefits of this “confidence booster” and mental release through this genre of Hip Hop, others have vocally articulated similar stories.

Although the concept of ratchet is used for Black Queer youth, as a Black Queer educator the same principles apply which is the inspiration for the research. As a Black queer educator, this concept of Black ratchet imaginative expression is a way to release or escape the constraints of work and personal life due to my intersectionalities. The unapologetic persona of being ratchet allows me to be detached from the “teacher role.” Ratchetness allows for me to humanize and coddle my emotional needs as a Black womxn in a way that is free from judgment and expressive. I am newly introduced to the practice of mindfulness through my personal journey of self-discovery, veganism, and holistic well-being. I also met with a colleague in the field of therapy to engage in bi-weekly Hip Hop related mindfulness activities via Zoom. As the social and emotional team leader at my school, I bring forth new initiatives that educational stakeholders and students can use together to bring support, in particular, using deep breathing strategies and one-minute meditations. Students have expressed how the moment of silence and reflection has added a sense of calmness and peacefulness to the environment. Doing my own research on the practices and having an accountability partner to implement it in my personal life has been beneficial for myself and other professionals.

### **Data Collection**

There are four types of data commonly collected in autoethnographic research: personal memory data, self-observational data, self-reflective data, and external data. Researchers suggest that data can be collected from sources including field notes of critical conversations, matrix and field notes of daily interactions and routines, self-reflective journaling using prompts, and archival data (diaries, photographs, lesson plans, student surveys, program evaluation, teacher

evaluation, staff surveys) (Chang, 2008; Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). Critical conversations are defined as informal interviews with critical stakeholders (Chang, 2008). Critical conversations were organic and impromptu conversations with colleagues, former students, family and friends which occurred throughout the day. Personal memory data recollection includes data gathered from archival data such as diaries, events, pictures, people, or experiences that bring forth epiphanies related to the research topic. Self-observational data can be notes, logs, memos, recordings, or journals that capture the researcher's actions, feelings, and behaviors over the course of the research. Self-reflective data include free-form (without any predetermined schema) journaling or recording that is more interpretive and is a reflection of the researchers past or present experiences and “sociocultural issues affecting them” (Chang, 2013, p. 73). Self-observational data and self-reflective data have slight differences. Self-observational data tracks trends related to research as they occur, while self-reflective data records data of overall daily experiences related to the research. External data includes interviews, textual artifacts (official documents, newspapers, reports), literature and archival data such as cultural artifacts (photos, social media posts, text messages, emails). Chang (2008) revealed that interviews can be constructed with families, friends, or strangers for the purpose to “stimulate your memory, to fill in gaps in information, to gather new information about you and other relevant topics, to validate your personal data, and to gain others' perspectives on you” (p. 106). Many of these forms of data collection align with practices within Hip Hop Therapy, including self-reflection and self-observation through journaling, especially when utilizing prompts. During the 10-week investigation, 8-weeks were dedicated to collecting data, leaving 2 weeks of reflection. Some data collection methods were completed simultaneously with others in the same week. The forms of data collection also align with practices within Hip Hop Therapy:

- Method#1 (8 weeks) Collecting Personal Memory Data(Autobiographical timeline):  
Using Chang's (2008) prompt 5.1 (Appendix A & Appendix C ) and Critical Conversation Guide (Appendix D), I created an autobiographical chart of events using critical conversations and archival data including pictures, archival teacher evaluations, archival student/teacher feedback, past journal entries, social media posts, text messages, emails, calendars and lesson plans that shaped and impacted my intersectionalities and mental well-being. Because music is a key component in Hip Hop therapy, music was utilized to probe previous data from my developing years and teaching career.
- Method #2 (7 consecutive days) Collecting Observational Data pt.1: I chronicled life routines for seven consecutive days at the beginning and end of the study to analyze daily patterns of social and emotional well-being and any occurrences on how my intersectionalities informed my practice and any occurrences of the impact of MBSR and HHT. Observational data was collected via audio recording, field notes, and journaling. I utilized Chang's (2008) prompt 5.2 (Appendix C). Prompts were tailored to fit the cultural diversity of the study.
- Method #3 (14 weeks) Collecting Observational Data pt.2: self-observational journaling was conducted using Otter voice recording to analyze trends of social and emotional well-being, daily interactions, and events that align with MBSR and HHT. This took place a minimum of 3 times per week over 14 weeks. Field notes and memos of daily interactions and events were taken alongside observational journaling for eight weeks using voice recording and journaling.
- Method #4 (Bi-Weekly) Collecting Self-Reflective data: Reflective journaling was conducted using Evans-Winters (2020) text, *Mindfulness for the Boss Chick*, for the

mindfulness prompts chart (Appendix E) and Chang's (2008) prompts (Appendix C) at a minimum of every two weeks, totaling 5 reflective journal entries via voice recording as journaling. Prompts are tailored to fit the needs of the study. The journals were reflections of occurrences throughout the day as they relate to the research questions, in particular MBSR and HHT utilized throughout the week. Journaling is an effective component of mindfulness practices and Hip Hop therapy. Writing prompts utilized in Chang (2008) Chang's prompts 5.2-5.5 and 5.8(Appendix C) and Evans-Winters (2020) text (Appendix E) were used for reflection. Hip Hop music was also used to probe reflection, but the evidence will be reviewed to what extent. An example of Chang's (2008) writing exercise 6.2 (see Appendix C) and Evans-Winters (2020) prompts state:

- Select a specific behavioral or cognitive topic on which you want to observe yourself. Select a manageable time frame for your self-observation and identify a recording method (narrative, structured format, or hybrid). Conduct systematic self-observation and record your observation including context information such as time, duration, location, people, occasion, and mood. (Chang, p. 93)
  - What thoughts or feelings surfaced? ((Evans-Winters, p.40,2020)
  - What other thoughts do you have about the reflection/prompt? (Evans-Winters, 2020, p. 40)
- Step #5 (8 weeks) Collecting External Data-Critical Conversations: Critical conversations using the Critical Conversations Guide (Appendix D) were conducted with colleagues, former students, friends, and family. I utilized Chang's (2008) writing exercise 7.1 to identify participants (Chang, 2008, p. 106). Field notes were taken from critical

conversations. By being in the classroom, critical conversations are some of the steps that can be implemented simultaneously or out of chronological order depending on the occurrence of data. If probing is needed for critical conversations a critical conversation questions guide will be utilized (see Appendix D).

- Method #6 Final Reflection: This took place for a month using the Otter recordings that were used to in Methods #1-#5 and Data Dive Document (Appendix G) to organize the data to evaluate and check for patterns of implementation of practices that help support and create a liberatory space.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

Thematic analysis was utilized in this investigation by creating codes, code families, and themes from the data. Thematic analysis (TA) is utilized for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data, which provides accessible and systemic procedures for generating codes and themes (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Braun and Clark (2006) explained that “Thematic analysis is widely used, but there is no clear agreement about what thematic analysis is and how you go about” (p. 79). Braun and Clarke (2006) described the process of thematic analysis in the following five steps: familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Butina (2015) suggested that data collection be completed in the following five stages: (a) organization and preparation of the data, (b) obtaining a general sense of the information, (c) the coding process, (d) categories or themes, and (e) interpretation of the data.

Prior to analyzing the data, all reflections and observations from data collection method #2-5 were converted into a video recording using *Otter*. The recordings were transcribed for

accuracy. This allowed for data to be easily transferable into themes by converting contents into words. Next, to filter through the content, I re-read the transcriptions and highlighted critical themes, words, or phrases; then placed them on the Data Dive Document (Appendix G).

Proceeding, I read the filtered ideas and themes that were on the Data collection Document and curated summaries of the information, while paying particular attention to any recurring themes, words, or phrases. As I read the summaries, I coded them with numbers 1-5 which symbolized my social emotional well-being during each recording; 1 is for poor wellbeing and 5 is exceptional wellbeing. Because the *Otter* recording system was used to find words and phrases rapidly, I did not find the need to code themes within the summaries. Also, the Data Collection Document served as the coding system. Following, I closely looked at the summaries and social emotional well-being ratings to highlight key themes or phrases that recur in the data and assign each research question with a specific color in order to color code each theme or summary with the color that is associated with the question number it answers. Finally, I provided a visual representation of social and emotional well-being, I created a line graph and plotted every 5 recordings on the graph to see if there is an upward trend in my wellbeing as a result of consistent and intentional Hip Hop therapy and mindfulness practices.

### **Reciprocity and Authenticity**

The risks within the study included the possibility of researcher bias and interpretations influencing the data from the research. Another risk was confidentiality of the participants that will be utilized in critical conversations. Ensuring that the identity of individuals participated in the critical conversations was a priority in the research. The benefit of this research is that I was able to analyze myself as a subject to grow a deeper understanding of my well-being which addressed a larger phenomenon.

### **Strategies for Quality/Trustworthiness**

According to Le Roux (2016), there are four aspects that determine the trustworthiness of autoethnographic work: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The author further outlined specific means of trustworthiness as an autoethnography by providing five sublayers to the criteria of trustworthiness: subjectivity, self-reflexivity, resonance, credibility and contribution. Trustworthiness is a pivotal component because without authenticity of perspective the data will only reflect the researcher's desired outcome. In this research, subjectivity was addressed by incorporating multiple data points from my journaling and daily self-reflections to gather a deeper understanding of self and the phenomenon. I also included the diverse perspectives of others from the critical conversations.

To ensure self-reflexivity and credibility, I had multiple data points of investigation, including self-reflections and critical conversations with outsiders. This ensured the authenticity of the experiences being investigated. To ensure that resonance, I was completely vulnerable and relatable within my reflections, I grasped the essence of what many educators endure and possible solutions for those that are similarly situated. Because the research explored initiatives and impact of diverse identities and intersectionalities that are not prevalent in educational research, the study contributed to the analysis and understanding of Black, queer, and ratchet educators. Positioning the research in this manner, allowed for future research to take a more in-depth analysis on one of the many intersectionalities explored. The study was transferable because I intend to take the data to curate a SEL plan for individuals with similar intersectionalities and analyze the effectiveness. The importance of transparency and vulnerability within my data collection and analysis is imperative to ensure credibility. I ensured validity within my evidence by having multiple forms of data collection as a means of checks

and balances. By having a systemic process of analyzing data, I was able to compare findings across samples of my data collected.



## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### **Black Ratchet Queer Affirmations**

#### **Quotes from voice reflections and journal**

“I’m on my mission and my purpose and I will speak longevity of life everyday” (Recording #16)

“I need to make time and make it a priority” (Recording #20)

“God keeps me in a youthful spirit” (Recording #25)

“ I want everyone else to be blessed” ( Recording #25)

“ I really want to just manifest happiness” ( Recording #39)

“ I want to reclaim my time to be in my community” (Recording #39)

“God is manifesting Great fucking shit y’all” (Recording #40)

“I Just love Black People energy” ( Recording #40)

“Every morning we do a sesh” (Recording #43)

“ I feel established and accomplished today” (Recording #45)

“I swear God's blessings, be blessing-ing honey,” (Recording #64)

“I feel ready for the year. I feel like my spirit’s in the right place” (Recording #64)

“I love it when my tribe does.” ( Recording #64)

“ I feel accomplished, I feel loved, I feel appreciated” ( Recording #65)

## **Black Ratchet Queer Viewing List and Playlist**

### **Shows and Songs from voice reflections and journal**

#### **Viewing List**

P.Valley By: Katori Hall

Hoochie Daddies By: Crystal Hutchinson aka Wootie

The Chi By: Lena Waithe- Showtime

Erykah Badu v. Jill Scott Verzuz- Youtube

Gucci v. Jeezy Verzuz- Youtube

#### **Playlist**

Megan Thee Stallion- Realer

Megan Thee Stallion- Not Nice

Sexyy Red- Pound Town

Sexyy Red- Skee-ee

Doja Cat- Fuck The Girls(FTK)

Doja Cat- Love Life

Killer Mike- Run

Killer Mike- This is for the Junkies

Kendrick Lamar- Love Talking

Drake- Closer

Drake & Central Cee- On the Radar Freestyle

Gunna-Fuckumean

50 Cent- Many Men

Larry June- Water my plants

Luh Tyler- Florida Water

BigXthePlug- Primetime

ThatMexicanOT-Groovin

### **Enjoy!**

The purpose of this autoethnographic study was to systematically investigate and thematically reflect on stressors endured in my lived experiences as a Black ratchet queer womxn educator and provide insight on managing my social emotional well-being as an effort to defy respectability politics. This study explored the impact that culturally relevant mindfulness practices and Hip Hop therapy had on my social and emotional well-being as a ratchet Black Queer womxn educator.

Data revealed that various supports used to help improve my social emotional well-being, also hindered my progress to wellness. Results mirrored the research present in the literature review and addressed the gap within research that emphasizes social and emotional

well-being for ratchet Black queer womxn educators. The research questions used to guide this study are as follows:

1. How do my intersectionalities of being a ratchet Black queer womxn impact my social and emotional well-being as an educator?
2. In what ways do culturally relevant practices and elements of Hip Hop therapy support the social and emotional well-being of my intersectionalities in combating respectability politics as an educator?
3. How have culturally relevant mindfulness practices and Hip Hop therapy led to liberatory educational space?

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the key findings that emerged from the data through the presentation of three major themes: mothering, Hip Hop healing, and holistic liberatory spaces. As a self-identified Black ratchet lesbian educator, my experiences and mental well-being are impacted by the stressors of respectability politics as it relates to my intersectionalities. As a connoisseur of Hip Hop music, culture, and southern ratchet aesthetics, I utilized these factors to support my social and emotional well-being, as well as culturally relevant practices. The study's limitations resided in the nature of the methodology as autoethnographic research. Expanding the content to research methods that allots for multiple perspectives allows for richer content to be developed in the future that will support ratchet Black queer studies.

The themes discovered in this research rippled the foundation of Hip Hop and Hip Hop therapy: curating, creating and cultivating. The data also affirmed the current research expressed within the literature review pertaining to limitations and supports of SEL for Black ratchet queer educators. The 3 major themes that emerged from the research are the following:

curating/cultivating community through mothering, curating/cultivating Hip Hop as healing, and curating/cultivating liberatory support spaces.

Research Question 1 (RQ1) was curated to seek information on what impacted my mental wellness as a ratchet Black queer womxn. This investigation analyzed the intersectional identity of ratchetness as it relates to my teacher identities and well-being. The purpose of this question is to shed light on the stressors that deeply impact me as a person that defies respectability politics. With teacher mental health on the decline, especially as a result of the pandemic, it is imperative to gauge a deeper perspective into the lived experiences of educators that are currently in the field and what hinders their wellness. Teachers that have revealed that they have poor mental health are more likely to leave the profession, and Black teachers were more likely to leave than whites (Doan et al., 2023). With the decline in the already underrepresented Black teacher population, it is vital to analyze factors that contribute to the decline in wellness. This perspective is limited in research; thus this study intends to fill the gap that provides more insight into Black ratchetness as a form of liberation and support against the concept of acceptability.

Research Question 2 (RQ 2) dives deeper into the support for me as an educator with diverse intersectionalities, especially pre and post pandemic in which education is fragile. Focusing educator social emotional learning and well-being as the foundation of the study opens other research into teacher centered and curated SEL as an option to combat occupational and personal stress in a post-pandemic world. Current research centers on how teachers can support student SEL without taking into account that teacher SEL works in tandem with supporting student wellbeing; “stressed-out teachers tend to have stressed-out students” (Schonert-Reichl, 2017, p. 137). RQ 2 also explores culturally relevant mindfulness practices and elements of Hip Hop Therapy as interventions to combat stressors provoked by respectability politics within

educational and personal spaces. Seminal research of Hip Hop therapy analyzed the impact that it had on Black and Brown youth within educational and correctional facilities. This question offers new insight into how practical uses of Hip Hop therapy such as engaging in dance, using Hip Hop music as outlets of reflection, and partaking in storytelling, as interventions for adults. This question seeks to investigate how Hip Hop is used as a form of liberation, emotional release, reflection, and healing to support my social emotional wellness as an educator.

Research Question 3 (RQ 3) brings full circle how supporting teacher SEL translates into the classroom to create liberatory spaces. The literature reveals that when educators invest in their wellbeing it reflects in the classroom. Research also reveals that culturally relevant SEL combats systemic stressors:

SEL interventions have been criticized, however, for lack of cultural sensitivity and attention to racial injustice, particularly in the aftermath of racialized trauma and state-sanctioned violence in cities and schools across the country.

(White et al., 2022)

RQ 3 informs research that investigates the outcomes of effective SEL. This study holds insight on the importance of ensuring teachers create and engage in personal wellness because it transfers into their educational spaces. Investigating wellness initiatives that are practical and fit within their professional and personal schedules.

The proceeding text will reveal how the three themes are informed in the research question. The three themes answered RQ1 and RQ3, and the first two themes were addressed in RQ 2. I will go into more in depth details that elaborate on how each question was answered in themes after coding and utilizing Appendix D.1 and Appendix E.1 to organize the data for

thematic analysis.

### **Theme #1: Cultivating and Curating Community Through Mothering**

The first and most prominent theme that was discovered in my research was cultivating and curating community through mothering. This theme revealed the positive and negative influence that “mothering” had on my overall well-being. The concept of mothering was rooted in my connection to the mother figures in my life, my mom and grandmother. I discovered that these mother figures represented the “racehorse” mentality or overextension of self, while exemplifying the epitome of agape love for their family and community. The influence of my mother and grandmother had an impactful influence on how I nurtured myself and others.

Empirical research reveals how stereotypical roles for Black womxn can negatively influence wellness by stating that the strong Black woman archetype “was created during slavery as a survival response to an existence rife with violence, exploitation, and oppression, and it has been passed intergenerationally through parents’, particularly mothers’, socialization of Black girls” (Donovan & West, 2014, p. 1). My data confirmed these historical hindrances by revealing that being perceived as a motherly figure offers heightened stress and responsibility. On the other hand, evidence revealed that the act of self-mothering served as a primary factor for preserving my well-being. Self-mothering was defined in my research as the conscious ability and prioritization of nurturing my boundaries for the goal of self-preservation. RQ1 was positioned to investigate and analyze the external and internal stressors that impact the well-being of Black ratchet Queer womxn educators. Evidence that answered RQ1 revealed that the concept of creating and harvesting personal and professional communities through mothering served as a hindrance and healing.

The concept of cultivating community through mothering is richly engraved into my teaching practice and personal life, thus creating both rewarding and detrimental benefits. Evidence from critical conversations and field notes revealed the positive impact of these maternal bonds in supporting and uplifting my SEL throughout my life. Maternal bonds were key factors that influenced my concept of open-mindedness and my outlook on life which positively impacted my SEL. Later research also revealed the impact of paternal bonds which will be discussed later. One piece of evidence states, “all the mother figures in my life, especially my mom, my grandma really shaped me, who I am, and my intersectionalities, you know It has definitely shaped me as far as like openness to people” (Recording #8). This also brought great insight into the depths and formation of my ratchet and motherly identity. My critical conversation data revealed how others grew a deeper understanding of my identity and positionality within my communities through my maternal bonds, “I meet your mom, and I understand your personality” because She's just like me times 10 And my grandma so, you know, she was so mild but powerful” (Recording #8).

The research also exemplified how the concept of nurturing, fostering, and guiding others and self can possess positive and negative outcomes on mental health. Research exposed my dependency to be “poured into,” when I do not feel fulfilled. To sustain this notion of fulfillment, overextending myself within my communities is a mechanism utilized. On the contrary, this act of service has proven to carry stress and burden to fulfill the “motherly” role within my professional and personal relationships.

The investigation revealed that as a Black queer cis gendered woman, the societal privilege within my gender identity and marginalized sexual orientation, positioned me to unintentionally be burdened to advocate in multiple spaces in which my identities exist. When



advocating in these spaces, it isolated me and caused discomfort because of my marginalized identities; especially in feminine cis-gendered heterosexual spaces and white Queer spaces. Similar instances within the data revealed the desperate need to mother and nurture myself as a solution to counter stress induced by overextension. Within this theme of curating and cultivating through mothering, three sub themes merged. The subthemes are the following: Self-Sacrifice (obligation of over extension), Melanin Magic (Matriarch Mammy), and Self-preservation through reclaiming (reclaim my time, light, and charge). These subthemes illuminated insight into RQ 2 and RQ 3 by revealing methods in which mindfulness and Hip Hop therapy was utilized in supporting my well-being and how that transfers into creating a liberatory space within the classroom.

#### **Subtheme #1- Self-sacrifice (obligation of overextension)**

Although as an educator and older sibling, nurturing came naturally in educational and personal spaces; it was discovered that my well-being was greatly influenced by my service or overextension to my community for the greater good. When I conducted a critical conversations with a former colleague it was revealed that I have this “contagious happy energy” of support or “Black people energy...despite the challenges of being a Black person in a society you manage to give out that energy...So whenever Black people are facing oppression, I feel attacked as well and I’m ready to fight.” My participant in that critical conversation is also a different person of color; which is why I thought their statement was very profound. I feel “fulfilled, loved, and accomplished” when I know I am helping to propel my community forward, especially my Black queer community. This element of feeling obligated to overextend myself for my community has shown to be a detriment to my well-being, simultaneously as it supports which complicates the logic. Over exhaustion and overextension, I discovered stemmed from wanting to be the

representation in predominantly white or heteronormative spaces. This is problematic to wellbeing because the root of my discomfort is also the root of my well-being, which is being in these spaces that are opposite of my identities. Trying to reclaim my space in my black community was discovered as being stressful and trying to reclaim my space in cis-women spaces as a femme with oppositional perspectives of my gender. In my research I often referred to myself or was referred as “one of the bros.” In predominantly white queer spaces, I noticed my Blackness more than my gayness and discovered how the two intersectionalities can create isolation or inclusion that can seem as though I was the “token” Black ratchet queer womxn within various personal, professional, and academic spaces. One reflection from the data reveals this dichotomy of emotional that illuminates this phenomenon:

I can see, I can start seeing how my intersectionalities play out in these spaces, especially these predominantly white spaces, , even though I know I'm not the only black, it's a good chunk of us there ...I'm not saying it's a bad thing, but I definitely felt othered and that's not saying that's anyone's fault intentionally...Okay, you're queer, but you're black ... I feel like for me being black in this queer space, I have to be visible for these black queer kids. Because we need representation and because that's my obligation first and foremost, even though my obligation is to community. (Reflection # 42)

Evidence also revealed how mothering and overextension also supports my SEL by giving me a purpose, as well as appreciation. The feeling of being with “my kids” including my students and the youth I serve in my community is a foundation for supporting positive mental well-being. The nostalgia is similar to stardom as expressed in a quote I said after conducting

critical conversations with former students and families. These interactions made me feel like “a local celebrity” within my community.

Y'all know that every time I see my kids. I'm so excited. It's like it makes me happy it's the joy of my, my life, seeing my students and their families and that's one thing I do love about teaching even though I keep on saying " I'm gonna leave, I'm gonna leave" but I love just being in the community and like getting to see my kids and be in the community where they at and just you know, being a face like "oh my god, I've seen you all the time at the store at the mall." Like the kids know that Look, Miss W's in the streets, like in my community. She's, you know, just seeing teachers in a community. I don't know for me; I feel like that's important” (Reflection #55)

### **Subtheme #2: Melanin Magic and “Matriarch Mammy”**

Manifesting African spirituality and ancestral magic to support SEL and living up to the notion of melanin magic was a trend in the data that supported my well-being and progress towards liberation. Historically, Blacks have maintained deep connections with their faith, spirituality, and ancestral connections. Throughout the study, I grew a closeness with my relationship to God, ancestors, and earth that supported my wellness through times of adversities, despite me not being anchored in one religion or faith. In Reflection # 10, I stated that “talking to God and just saying what up to the ancestors and I'm like, you know every power or whatever it is that's, you know, that I need to receive I just want to be open to receive it and things like that.” This supports the concept of Melanin Magic through manifestation and faith as anchors of supporting my wellbeing. On the contrary, the concept of Melanin Magic also resonates with another interpretation that coincides with subtheme #1 of self-sacrifice and overextension.

Living up to the Black Girl Magic or Melanin Magic expectation was deeply rooted in generational and historical standards that can be interpreted as being a “Matriarch Mammy.” This concept of being steadfast, authoritarian in using my voice, and being a “racehorse” was not deemed problematic in my life prior to conducting this study, but later revealed to be generational trauma. I stated that “I feel like that's my mode of survival and so far it's my mode of thriving in this world,” as expressed in reflection # 10. Reflection #18 sheds light on an example in which my determination, magic, and straightforwardness created an opportunity that was not given to those in a similarly situated position. The research states, “I wanted to tell her it's a melanin magic baby like, look, everybody loves us, especially [us] black women. Everybody loves us but y'all love to hate us and it's crazy.” The notion of manifesting and utilizing natural powers or magic through mindfulness practices and ancestral connections supported positive wellness through guidance and spirituality. Other research studies mentioned in the literature review also echoed how faith-based practices help to build culturally relevant practices. On the other hand, when others held me to that same expectation of making magic happen, it became a task that burdened stress to live up to the expectation.

Expecting to always say “Yes” to a task handed to me and masterfully executing that plan has been the expectation created within my professional and personal environments, which was clearly articulated in the data. My self-validation is determined by how much I accomplish which is detrimental and supportive to my mental space. The trend of having both positive and negative outcomes throughout this journey is prevalent throughout this investigation. Evidence of this notion is revealed by stating that, “...And not be such a racehorse and the perfectionist and all. Mentally I feel good this week, and I didn't think I would feel good this week. I got things accomplished” (Reflection #18).

### **Subtheme #3- Reclaiming my time, light, and charge**

Within the process of liberation, reclaiming my well-being and releasing generational expectations has been found to be critical. This subtheme channels the concept of self-mothering as a way to support well-being. Research reveals that, “Black women should be cautious about embracing the SBW [Strong Black Woman] stereotypic image which views excessive strength, caregiving, and emotional restraint as central to Black womanhood” (Donovan & West, 2014, p. 5). I discovered that intentionality, consistency, and solitude benefitted in supporting my mental-health in combating these narratives and expectations of “Matriarch Mammy, melanin magic, or the racehorse mother. This theme emphasizes the practice of reclaiming my time through self-preservation entails me setting aside time for self-care within smaller moments of time. This practice resulted in positively impacting my SEL by allowing me to “recharge” by intentionally creating a space in my classroom, car, restroom and other settings for me to sit in silence. Implementing an SEL plan prior to the school year starting was essential for showing positive outcomes when implementing MBSR and HHT. The recordings reveal that “I’m really trying to ramp up my mindfulness and meditation practices. Before school starts, I want to be mentally prepared, and this is going to be a challenging school year. I’ve been told” (Recording #35). Intentionality manifested in the classroom because I became more intentional and purposeful with my mindfulness minutes in the class and students noticed. My mindfulness became more intentional and routine, thus I noticed an increase in positive social emotional wellness. By creating my own spaces of peace and silence, I fostered my own liberatory space of emotional release, expression, and individuality for myself and my classroom. Needing the duality of vibrancy/loudness with silence. Self-care has been an important tenant in this research.

Reclaiming my “light” was a topic that appeared prominently in the research. Having the feeling that I have to “kind of like I dim my light” to accommodate the feelings of others or preserve my ratchetness with the hesitation of being judged in the gaze of respectability. This investigation further solidified the notion of Black queer womxn educators feeling insufficient or as an imposter in a space that is not designed for us. This occurrence was frequent in my data. One example in particular from field notes taken during a critical conversation revealed this hindrance of the imposter syndrome and how that feeling equated to the shyness of a child. The evidence stated:

I've been more reflective lately and I learned that my imposter syndrome was real. Even had a conversation with [Participant], throughout the conversation I was getting anxious and nervous, and I felt like a little girl. It's like when I get anxiety, I feel like a child again because I feel as though I'm around all these giants (Reflection #38)

Silence is another critical tool in support my SEL within educational and personal spaces. Silence in this investigation gained popularity within the study to recharge my energy. An early piece of data reveals my preference for not engaging with others during this critical time by revealing that, “I just needed to kind of recharge in my room . I haven't been socializing as much at work.” Although that time is silence, it also served as a space of production. Embracing silence within my classroom was also transferred into practice frequently through meditation. Utilizing YouTube, I gathered resources that I used in and out of the classroom to harvest silence and neutralize the discomfort that silence can bring, especially to Black youth. A Kobe Bryant video was used for inspiration in which I stated that “okay, even Kobe meditates and sit in silence for 10 minutes a day and I'm like, Okay, let me just try that cuz I think I'm overthinking this whole mindfulness mental meditation thing” (Reflection #34). The evidence revealed a

pattern of silence and mindfulness meditation that took place from one minute to fifteen minutes at least 3-5 consecutive days. The time dedicated for silence increased throughout the investigation and was evident to produce healing effects. The data reveals the following:

- But y'all I'm tired, I realize how much I love silence so much. And so I sat in my class, in silence and just got work done (Recording #7)
- moments of like silence and deep thought where I'm just reflecting on like me and who I am (Recording #9)
- And I didn't realize how much I enjoy silence (Recording #15)
- At first I was like I didn't like silence, it made me very uncomfortable. But oh my gosh, I love silence...And it was beautiful to sit in pure silence for three freakin hours, two and a half hours and get my work done...I feel recharged in silence (Recording #15)
- At first I was like I didn't like silence, it made me very uncomfortable. But oh my gosh, I love silence...I feel recharged in silence. (Recording #15)
- I'm trying something new by making my mindfulness time like me time and making it more planned. (Recording #21)
- We do a quick little one to five minute meditation box breathing meditation with the kids. The box breathing gets me to focus on so I think when I do it with the class (Recording #28)
- I feel as though my emotional regulation has gotten better except for in traffic yesterday. I was on one yesterday... But I feel like my mood overall has been better and I don't know if that or a combination. In Drake's words (Recording #43)

This data also presents and confirms the research that emphasizes the importance of emotional recognition and regulation for teacher SEL. Within silence and mindfulness meditation I was

able to find my method in which I give myself time to decompress and evaluate my state of being within the silence.

### **Theme #2: Cultivating Hip Hop as Healing**

The theme of cultivating Hip Hop as healing is a major contributor in the research because it speaks to the healing components of Hip Hop for me as an educator. This theme contributes to the greater gap in Hip Hop therapy research by opening possibilities for further investigations into how HHT supports the mental health of adults, specifically educators combating with respectability politics enforced by supremacy and heteronormality. Despite my Hip Hop influence, the research revealed a shocking reality; I was not always a connoisseur of the genre until I reached the end of elementary school. I was very much into alternative and pop genres that included artists like Spice Girls, N'Sync, Britney Spears and others. There was not much Black representation in my music selection. In retrospect, my musical awakening was prompted by my parents' love and appreciation for local and global Hip Hop and music.

In this investigation, Hip Hop music was used as a reflective and affirming mechanism, as well as to promote generational bonds and youthfulness as healing. The importance of connectivity with others is essential in supporting teacher SEL and this investigation emphasized the importance of finding familial and communal healing spaces within Hip Hop. As suggested in earlier literature, using Hip Hop music in this manner creates therapeutic outcomes. The theme and subthemes speak towards RQ 2 because it provides insight into practices that combat respectability politics. The data answered the research question by exemplifying how Hip Hop is used to heal. The research revealed how I created and used affirmations from Hip Hop songs that I heard. Essentially, the study showed how I used Hip Hop to create meditation and mindfulness spaces. Throughout the investigation, I have used Hip Hop to introduce students to mindfulness,



used reflecting on lyrics in the classroom and personal life, which is critical in HHT.

### **Subtheme #1: Hip Hop as Affirmation**

The data revealed how I used Hip Hop music as motivation, as well as affirmed me as a ratchet Black lesbian. The data revealed songs and lyrics that I listened to during times in which my stress was heightened and regulated. I realized that the music reflected how I felt when it was difficult or unable to articulate the emotions with fidelity. The music served as an intervention to support my emotional recognition and regulation. This theme answered RQ 2 by elaborating on how Hip Hop was used for the supporting my well-being by being a tool for motivating, affirming, emotional recognition and regulation. An example of songs that were mentioned in the data was *Many Men* by 50 Cent and *Run Nigga, Run* by Killer Mike. These two songs to me reflected the fragile life of being a Black queer womxn within academia and my positionality in a world in which LGBTQIA+ erasure is heavily present. These songs connected my Black and queer identity to the struggles I endured, and it provided me with a greater insight into my life purpose; this idea of cultivating community which was present in theme #1. Both songs gave me motivation and affirmed me within my professional environments. Hip Hop music was also used to boost my confidence in settings in which I was the minority or out of place. In a reflection I stated the following:

one of my favorite albums by 50... and for whatever reason this shit hit differently. I want to cry because I'm like, as a black queer womxn... Too many men and some sisters many men wish death upon me. blooded my eyes dog and I can't see like, Yo, that shit hit differently because people want me dead because I'm black dead because I'm womxn dead because I'm gay. Like, you know (Recording #16)

The song by Killer Mike was used more so as my motivation to push through the adversities that are placed upon me based on my intersectionalities. When reflecting on this song, it was a cry of release that followed. In this moment I felt as though I was given my momentum to keep pushing forward and that my mission in life is not my own. Although this complex of having my community on my back can be stressful, be reassured that I can do it to support my mental well-being. Research reveals the following after listening to *Run Nigga Run* :

Dave Chappelle is narrating in the beginning part ...a whole bunch of greatness on the album...

...Like what Dave Chappelle said, he was like, “Don't be scared”, like “Nigga you need to get up and run like you're a leader...”

And I didn't realize I'm afraid to be a leader like I'm afraid to push myself and I don't know what's next. Like when it comes to leaving school and all that I'm scared. I don't know what's next. I feel like I'm not prepared...

...this whole time I thought I was very much a leader but um, I realize I'm not like I'm, which is fine. I think I do better as a background person...

like that, that whole intro was just motivational... just gave me like motivation like don't be scared of what's coming next. Just like be ready and whenever is your time is your time. I had this mini moment why am I don't know who I am trying to rediscover and figure out like, who I am authentically(Recording #27)

Another song that was revealed to affirm me as a Black womxn was the song “Not Nice,” by Megan Thee Stallion. The song was mentioned in my data as a mechanism of reflection in the

moment of encountering imposter syndrome. The quote states, “I guess my skin not light enough, my dialect not white enough...But fuck it ‘cause I’m Black, Biggie-Biggie Black...Fuck it Bitch, I’m not nice, I’m the shit. I’m done with bein’ humble ‘cause I know that I’m that bitch” (Megan Thee Stallion, 2022). This song revealed how my defiance for respectability is my strength, yet weakness because it places me in a light to be perpetuated as the “Matriarch Mammy” or having Melanin Magic which are expectations that have shown to have positive and negative ramifications.

Other examples within my investigation that revealed how Hip Hop was internalized and used as healing is the prevalence of Hip Hop centered environments like concerts, festivals, and awards shows. The data illustrated how Hip Hop centered environments served as spaces of liberation and community by connecting like-minded individuals together with the purpose of appreciating the genre. During and after the pandemic, concerts and festivals were my healing places that allowed me free of judgment and the responsibility of upholding ideals that are deemed respectable. These spaces also allowed me to connect deeper with others through the experience of Hip Hop. Being in an environment that unifies diverse races, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, socio economic statues, and political backgrounds for the sake of Hip Hop provided me with needed hope. It affirmed my intersectionalities and created a brave space for me. The concert and festival environments curated for Hip Hop allowed me to feel connected to different identities and reassured me that there is goodness in the world.

Research further revealed the influence that concerts had on my development and connection to others. Concerts have been a part of my healing since middle school when I went to my first concert to see Bow Wow and B2K; this concert connected me to my peers and parents. My parents took me to this concert and the feeling of being acquainted with like-minded

teens, provided me with a place and sense of solidarity. I found acceptance from peers and encouragement from my parents despite my awkwardness as a young ratchet Black girl that is finding myself. It was evident in my research that when I indulged in Hip Hop outlets and spaces, they supported my well-being by being an unapologetic space. Evidence also showed how Hip Hop served as healing through Covid by curating creative spaces to connect with others during a time when concerts were put on pause. The Instagram and YouTube live streamed dual performances and that many artists utilized, especially Hip Hop artists, was the “Verzuz” sponsored by Hip Hop producers, Swizz Beats and Timbaland. The evidence revealed that “Verzuz” was like my therapy by connecting nostalgic music to memories in a time of great stress and mental turmoil.

This experience also connected other Hip Hop enthusiasts worldwide by allowing us to comment and react to the artists' performances, as if we were at an actual concert. According to one reflection, “when they had the ‘Verzuz’ battles over COVID We live for the ‘Verzuz’” (Recording #63). My favorite artist and legend, Erykah Badu began the trend by having live stream concerts in her house and it turned into a dueling musical appreciation between her and singer, Jill Scott. Research explained how Erykah Badu’s influence in my elementary years impacted my development of myself as an eclectic and “weird” Black girl. She represented Afrocentrism and feminism in a Hip Hop world that was far from the white and the male gaze. Although her genre of music was not categorized as Hip Hop and more soul, the influence that Erykah Badu had and continues to have in the industry is what connects me to her. She was my representation of my identity within Hip Hop culture. The “Verzuz” expanded and many other rap, reggae, and singing legends like DMX, 2Chainz, Jazzy, Gucci, Brandy, Monica, and Beenie graced the “Verzuz” stage as thousands of viewers tuned in. In a critical conversation with my

partner, it was evident that this time connected by deepening our love and understanding for how the genre shaped our upbringing. This was where we united as a Hip Hop family in times of great adversity, which echoes the foundation of Hip Hop creation. I revealed my deeply rooted healing connection to Hip Hop in Recording #64 by stating that:

I love concerts. I love festivals. I love fucking Hip Hop. And it's crazy. I'm going to all these concerts and hip hop concerts during hip hop's birthday month. And y'all this is just like it's so cliché I know but this is my therapy. Hip Hop is truly my therapy... I love going to concerts and I just love experiencing Hip Hop and being around people with good energy. And the vibe and it's just so healing and refreshing to just be in these spaces. And especially to experience it with.

Hip Hop proved to be a pivotal tool for affirming and curating necessary spaces of liberation that supported my well-being.

## **Subtheme #2: Healing Through Generational Bonding**

The importance of the mixture of diverse genres of Hip Hop and African diasporic genres that appeared in the research as influential were DC go-go music, Reggaeton, and American West coast. This music also promoted memories of great joy, connectivity, and healing with my parental figures in my life. These genres were played in my household by my parents' connection through Hip Hop. The Hip Hop artist, DMX and the genre of DC go-go was often the playlist of my generational connection between my grandmother, parents, and myself. My mother heavily influenced my liking for go-go music, including Rare Essence band, Backyard Band, Trouble Funk, and Chuck Brown. This was the music of the culture in the DMV (Washington, D.C, Maryland, and Virginia) that my mother embodied and wanted to keep me connected to, especially when moving to Charlotte, North Carolina. When returning home, there is that nostalgia when I heard DC go-go performances that kept me form. Hip Hop is also a tool

utilized as generational healing within my family because many critical moments in my life can be connected to a common rap song or artist that my parents and grandmother would sing or rap.

My mother and I recalled my grandmother's constant reference to the songs "Run Joe" by go-go legend Chuck Brown and "The Message" by Grand Masterflash. I can recall my grandmother singing beautifully off key "Don't push me cuz I'm close to the edge, I'm trying not to lose my head." My parents were and continue to be an influence to my exposure and healing through Hip Hop, "Even them [Parents] being young impacted in my identity because I've always hip on a new music especially like new hip hop and things like that" (Recording # 8). This generational connection to Hip Hop played a pivotal role in my parents' relationship with me and how I perceive life with a view of youthfulness. Evidence revealed that "No, my parents were young. Well, they don't act like these old parents, and I love that because I feel like that. I tell people that my students keep me young but my parents being young keeps me young land keeps me young spirited but it's me. Old spirited and grounded too" (Recording #6). This concept connects to my next subtheme: Hip Hop as generational bonding and youthfulness which addresses RQ3: How have culturally relevant mindfulness practices and Hip Hop therapy led to liberatory educational space?

After my reflections and critical conversations with my parents and loved ones, it dawned on me that many of my great memories of bonding, coming out, and love for Hip Hop is rooted in the influence of my parents' connection to the genre and culture. With my parents being 20 years older than me, their age and placement within Hip Hop culture were major contributing factors to my influence; "both my parents were definitely hip hop heads" (Recording # 57A). Critical conversations with my mother revealed how female representation within Hip Hop was used to support my self-efficacy as a youth. To boost my confidence as a "weird" over-

developed child, my mom would always try to keep my hair styled in the most recent fashions that resembled artist like Da Brat and Lady of Rage with my braids and 2 afro puffs, “my mom’s would like say little things to boost my confidence. I was like a timid little kid. ...And then I remember Da brat when I first heard her” (Recording #57B). By my mom building my confidence by showing me images of women that did not meet typical heteronormative standards opened my perspective to other narratives of what womanhood looks like. Little did my mother know that this was also a lightbulb moment into my sexuality when I realized in elementary school that I liked women. This was evident in a later recording that revealed the moment of coming out as queer to my mom which brought this memory full circle. The moment of coming out to my mom toward the end of my high school year as I entered college, “we had a conversation of like, so are you gay? I’m like, No, I don’t think so. I’m like, No, I’m just we’re just really good friends” (Recording #30). The environment of trust and agape love she created was influenced by her diverse friend circle in which she had queer friends.

My stepfather, who I considered my “real dad,” really cultured me and coached me into Hip Hop. The paternal influence played a major factor in supporting my well-being with intersectionalities that defy respectability politics. I was into alternative music, pop, rock, neo-soul; but did not fall in love with Hip Hop until later in my elementary school years. My dad exposed me to west coast rappers like NWA, Tupac, Snoop and Dr. Dre which grew my love for the genre, as well as more mellow rap like Lauren Hill, The Roots, Tribe Called Quest and Black Sheep. The Notorious B.I.G was on constant repeat as my dad knew all the lyrics, but only played the clean version when I was around. My first taste of Hip Hop as healing was when I would indulge in watching music videos on “The Box ” network during my time of solitude after school. I did not have siblings until 5th grade; thus music videos were my outlet. I grew fond of

artists like Missy Elliot that would defy Hip Hop norms. Not only has Hip Hop proven to connect generations, but it has also been a pivotal component in my coming out process down south.

Reflections pertaining to building a sense of open-mindedness was fostered from my father and grandmother. They also were prevalent people that nurtured my Black queerness growing up. My father and grandmother always spoke of not being a judge of someone based on societal perceptions and circumstances, this mindset allowed me to be in new situations with ease. When my family relocated to North Carolina from Maryland, it was very much a culture shock and a hindrance in finding my identity, but the concept of open-mindedness allowed me to find my place in the unfamiliar. Through critical conversations with my parents and thorough investigation of my life timeline, I ironically discovered that I found comfort in strip clubs and strip club culture when I came out officially which was around the time of my transition to North Carolina from the DMV. I started going at age 19 in D.C to club Aqua with my best friend at the time, and I was exposed to the life of Black queer womxn strippers. The strip club is where I found great talent, beauty, and acceptance. That was where my love for Hip Hop and my sexuality met, which was pivotal in finding my identity within the queer community. A few years later after being settled in NC at the age of 22, I found a greater Black queer community, specifically lesbian, in which I began to establish more of myself and friend circle. Wednesday night was “Ladies Night” at the local strip club in Charlotte, Onyx and the queer dance club, Scorpios. My friends were well-known by the dancers, bouncers, and bartenders at both locations. They were a group of masculine identifying womxn. I was the only feminine identifying womxn that was considered one of the “bruhs.” Although I was finding my people, I still was in a place of insecurity when it came to officially coming out. Oddly, the strip club was



the place that allowed me to safely be open and unofficially come out to my parents. My parents took me and my friends to Onyx for my 25th birthday and I often say that “I have more fun with my parents.” Their openness and willingness contributed to my well-being as I was coming out into my sexuality. I also learned not to be ashamed of who I was and the culture of Hip Hop that I grew to admire through these experiences and interactions. Lane (2019) revealed in her study that one participant believed that “being in the club, drinking, having an otherwise good time while surrounded by BQW [Black Queer Women] allowed you to ‘let go’”(pg.86). The text also references the presence and influence of strip club culture in relation to Black queer womxn identities. My research replicated this knowledge by exemplifying the impact and necessity that this artistic and liberating space contributed to my safety and acceptance as a Black lesbian womxn. This generational connection between my parents and I allowed for complete transparency and vulnerability that created a safe space for me as a youth and adult. It has also allowed for an even closer bond to develop between my parents and I because they created and embraced my spaces of comfortability without judgment. This is an extremely rare circumstance for Black queer womxn and folx because of the lack of familial and generational acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community within Black households.

### **Subtheme #3: Healing Through Youthfulness**

After analyzing the data, I realized that keeping up with Hip Hop and other genres of music that my siblings, students, and young adults listen to creates a sense of youthfulness within me that serves as healing of generational and systemic trauma. Embracing the various shifts in Hip Hop music and culture allows for a close connection and pulse on the trends that I can utilize in my classroom as it relates to nuances of language, cultural interpretation, and diversity within the genre of Hip Hop and others. In the research, I often noticed myself repeating the notion that

“my students keep me young, but my parents being young keeps me young and keeps me young-spirited.” In the research, this concept of youthfulness manifests as a response to being respectable and responsible within my duties of educator, colleague, partner, daughter, sister, and mentor. Over the school year and summer, I found myself having the most fun when I was embracing my inner child with my students through games, karaoke, and spirit week. I can recall a vivid memory of my summer school students and I connecting over Hip Hop while embodying a youthful spirit “me and my students were dancing and singing Sexyy Redd during summer school and it was just good vibes.” Although I am deeply rooted in the core values of my family and spirituality; Hip Hop is another therapeutic measure that keeps me grounded. Being connected to the youthfulness in the culture enhances my wellness because “I feel like I’m being a better person a little bit, having more patience and understanding,” for the population I serve and the new perspectives that manifest from the genre. At its core, Hip Hop is the voice of the youth and the streets. Recording #25 articulated this duality of young and wise spiritedness by revealing that:

“ I am very dual spirit as I say or, or very oxymoronic. That's something. I feel like I'm very old-spirited, like I'm some auntie and Mama, but at the same time very young-spirited because I can relate to kids.”

“I feel like that's my secret of life and youthfulness. God keeps me in a youthful spirit and my ear close to the ground of the babes and the children.”

### **Theme #3: Curating and Cultivating Holistic Liberatory Support Spaces**

Coming into my sexuality was a delayed process that did not fully take place until my

early to mid 20s, although my parents were aware prior to my understanding at the age of 14. My father revealed that my sexuality never mattered to him, but the anger and hate of the world was his biggest concern. Unfortunately, my narrative in which I have two supportive parents is not common in the Black queer community. There must be great attention placed upon curating and cultivating liberatory support spaces of community for Black queer people, especially youth. It is imperative for people to have a space and community of support for the coming out process and beyond. The sub themes that stemmed from this theme are the following: Liberatory spaces for nurturing identity, homogeneous spaces of interest, and emphasizing the use of expression.

### **Subtheme #1: Liberatory Spaces That Nurture Identity**

My research revealed the high demand and importance of representation and mattering in a healing space, “to a lot of my kids, I’m their first gay teacher maybe I’ll probably be there only” (Recording #54). Liberatory spaces must nurture identity, while allowing for a place in which representation of identities are present and normalized. With this realization in mind, I am subconscious of creating a space that allows for all students to feel safe, included, and inquire. This also places an unintentional burden of being sure I am a stellar example of role model for other Black queer teachers knowing that I might be the only one my students will encounter. Creating an environment of acceptance and representation are vital components in curating liberatory spaces.

Research exposed that my desire to attempt to create space is rooted in my lack of control of the educational spaces around me, simply stated “I feel like we need more spaces to just like be” (Recording #37). My constant moving and transitions of 4 schools between middle and high school age, was pivotal because I was not stationary to create and grow with my environment, it

was forever changing. On the contrary, this impacted my adaptation to new encounters which was my gift or camouflage. This is also critical in the process of coming out because I was used to easily camouflaging my sexuality to prevent me from enduring criticism in my Black spaces. Some field notes revealed an eye-opening realization of not having an exclusive queer space to heal.

### **Subtheme #2: Creating Homogeneous Spaces of Interest**

In my adult years towards my late 20s and early 30s, my reflections and critical conversations revealed that my healing spaces are heterogeneous and diverse, although diversity is needed, having a homogenous space for Black queer liberation is scarce. Spaces are limited to work, school, and occasional gathering time with my friends and family over the weekends. The monotony of life routines brought great stress, anxiety and depression in my life. After analyzing two interviews I was featured in and my reflections, these realities were illuminated:

- “What is your queer space to heal? As like, I never thought about that. Like, you know, where it's like my queer space to like heal and vent and all this and, you know, just be and you know, I said, Well, it's interesting question like, I have my friends and stuff, but it was hard to think about that” (Recording #10)
- “I just felt I felt good being in that space around these beautiful black queer people and youth it was I thought it'd be overwhelmed, but it was needed” (Recording #33)
- “I wish I had more gay people around I have no gay teacher (Recording #41)
- “I never had space to come out... “It was hard to find like a girl that just like girls” (Recording #30)

The inability to find my circle or niche stemmed from my lack of trust and stability within my own girl/womxn circles of associates, these circles stem from childhood through adulthood. I was viewed as an outsider because of my misrepresented identity of being bisexual, although I was working through my identity. My mother revealed that, I was also different because of my passion for Blackness, my old spirit, love for Barbies and global news or culture, I was ratchet, but I was not what my peers would deem as “typical” for a DMV girl or a Black girl. Black queer womxn and girl spaces to develop identity are crucial in supporting my wellness. I categorized myself in my reflections as feeling as though I was “nobody’s type” within my Black queer space throughout high school and adulthood. In my Black queer young womxn circles I was considered “One of the Bro’s” although I present femme. This feeling of being outed for not being fully out negatively impacted my confidence and positionality within myself. One reflection revealed how I was ostracized in the spaces that were supposed to be supportive, “guys would sexualize you [me] in high school being in public school is like if a guy does something to you, and you retaliate then you're a bitch, and then I got that same shit from the gay girls.” The struggle of finding genuine Black queer womxn spaces is a continuous hindrance for my wellbeing.

After conducting critical conversations with my parents, I learned that I have always been ratchet, whether it is by perception of others or self- definition, mainly because of my boisterous positionality towards my opinions, joyful moments, and injustice in any form. In my parents’ house what they said was law, but I was always given permission to speak up in situations of discomfort, especially outside of the safety of home, especially at school if I felt uncomfortable, within respectable limitations especially towards adults. Being singled out for my intersectionalities impacted me since childhood, especially within educational settings. Instances

of racism, colorism, ableism, sexual harassment, bullying and other injustices that I perceived needed my voice, I spoke. This behavior was against my normal meek, timid, and mild temperament; but I was often deemed disrespectful or rude when I spoke because I was loud and passionate. I recalled an instance with my parents as young as 2nd grade being reprimanded for getting caught in school saying under my breath “fuck you” to a teacher that aggressively grabbed my fragile friend as she cried. This was a trauma for me because I was not used to these conditions at home or school. My only silent way to resolve my anger was to use such spicy dialogue. This is often the narrative of other young Black girls that turns pain into passion without filtration. Because of this gap within my process of developing my identity, it trickled into my advocacy and development in the classroom.

### **Subtheme #3: Emphasizing the Use of Expression**

By providing a space of voice and unapologetic expression through Hip Hop and Hip Hop culture, I attempt to cultivate liberatory space. Ratchet liberatory spaces in the class offer unapologetic voice and express for Black youth, Black queer youth and my own liberation. Recoding #46 revealed my desire for ratchet liberation during a time of intense stress, “I need to be around some ratchet too.” I discovered parallels between myself and my students when interacting with adults; deep rooted social anxiety and micromanaging of my space or “bossing me around.” When I socialize with adults “I’m super socially awkward and I never realized that until recently I’m like, oh shit.” It is evident in my reflections and observations that anxiety is a hindrance in my well-being, but when pushed out of my comfort zone it can be fulfilling. It feels as though it is an insult to my trust and professionalism. This shredded insight on how I allow for space and openness within my educational space that promotes mutual respect between myself and my students, “I haven’t had an experience with kids have spazzed on me and I’m

like it's a big respect thing. "Within curating liberatory spaces, I learned that I am also apprehensive when encountering students that are differently situated than myself due to the fear of my ratchetness being deemed "too much." This can be a hindrance to my wellbeing because of having to constantly think about being good enough in the perspective of students that are different from myself. These experiences also resulted in great satisfaction and wholeness in my educational spaces, "I felt so good like, connecting with these babies that I don't think that I will connect to like, not just my extra babies and sometimes they'd be getting on my nerves. like, oh my god, I'm ratchet. I'm extra But damn, sometimes y'all be doing too much."

Curating and cultivating holistic liberatory spaces that supports my wellbeing as a Black queer womxn educator centralized much of the data on holistic initiatives through the merging of Hip Hop therapy culturally based mindfulness practices. The data informed the importance of these healing spaces to have cultural representation as a means of supporting buy-in. I was exposed to the culture and motion of Hip Hop at an early age prior to my awareness. My parents and grandmother would frequently have me involved in music related extracurricular activities as young as 5 years old. These activities including ballet, tap, jazz dance, Hip Hop dance, piano, and clarinet; despite my love for playing instruments was short-lived until I reached my late 20s. I grew a passion for dance, poetry, and song writing. My love for poetry started with my grandmother writing poetry in her free time, this is an art that I have been wanting to retain in more recent years. These influences probed my interest in being the rapper in my two-person group that consisted of my best friend and I during my 5th and 6th grade years. Although we only performed for our Barbie dolls and each other, having the freedom to create and pretend gave me empowerment that transferred to confidence as an adult. After analyzing my autobiographical timeline (Appendix A), I learned that although not consistent, dance has always

been a major factor in my love for Hip Hop, as well as supporting my wellness. Spending many hours in high school creating dance routines with my best friend at her house to a wide catalog of rap, R&B, and Baltimore club music. In recent reflections, dance has been an outlet in which I push out of my comfort zone, because I am challenged when participating. Simply stated, I lack rhythm. I have used dance to connect with youth and to reduce my anxiety in social settings.

Evidence reveals that dichotomy:

And they had their suit on was trying to dance and said, " I don't know what to do " and I'm like "it's okay to do you". And I we were gasin' each other up and I just I loved it and the kids came over there and was having fun to dance with us and you know I felt better (Recording #11).

In my adulthood, I mention the need or desire to “twerk” in my reflections as a form of release whether it is in the form of dance or yoga, “I miss my twerk yoga yesterday” (recording #29). My routines revealed that although I have a high interest and desire to be in a dance space, it was not a part of my wellness routine. Prior to my doctoral program, I was dedicated to my globally recognized dance group in 2019-2020 but had to abruptly end due to the intensity of the program. There were several attempts to attend Twerk workout, Hip Hop dance classes, Zumba, and Cardio Dance on Tuesday, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and/or Saturday. The root of the desire to twerk is dancing. These spaces of verve and physical release allowed me to find my group, my tribe, my community in which we come together for the sake of art. Within my intent and consistency of mindfulness practices, meditation and yoga have been key assets that I would consider to be a form of art because it takes exact consistency to improve.

Within the data, meditation was mentioned 27 times and yoga was mentioned 33 times which represented its prominence throughout the study. A key factor for both interventions was the consistency, intentionality, and timeliness of the practices. Evan-Winters (2020) text, Black



Yogi Nico (Black Yogi Nico Marie, 2018), and Xude Yoga (Xude Yoga, 2020) on YouTube were vital components in my wellness journey and in my classroom because they represent all of my intersectionalities and make mindfulness practices accessible to needed communities. Due to my lack of time with professional and academic stressors, the evidence revealed that extending myself to attend a class in which I had to go to a physical location hindered my desire to participate in mindfulness practices. As a result, I began practicing at home using YouTube. Prior to my consistent practice within the study, I obtained my 200 hour yoga certification, but did not practice as routinely. I often found in my reflections that I do not practice what I preach in my classroom as it relates to using mindfulness methods to cope with stress. Evidence revealed how the practices became transferable when I would consistently do my yoga and/or meditation in the morning for 10-30 minutes at least 3 days a week. This is where the “Black people Magic” manifested, as described by a culturally diverse college that I engaged in critical conversations with. When I “get out of the book or curriculum” and invest in exemplifying to my students the value of culturally relevant practices as it applies to their academic and mental wellbeing within a system of oppression. Making note of some of my reluctant students opening to trying the “mindful minute” practices in which we either sit in silence for 2 minutes or conduct box-breathing activities. I also utilized Kobe Bryant’s Mindfulness YouTube (Success Archive, 2016) to appeal to my athletes. The evidence proceeding reveals examples of personal and classroom practices of mindfulness:

- I did Dr. Evan Winters her mindfulness guide. Amazing breaks it down. I'm just like, damn, I'm doing mindfulness wrong. Like, I've felt like her book made it make sense. To

where it broke it down, and it wasn't so all over complex and all this you know, rhetoric... I gotta be more intentional with my meditation versus just okay, let me just get them do this thing (Recording #21)

- I did two 15 minute sessions with DJ Nico, Yogi, on YouTube, the aura, one for my chakras and one like a cleansing one and one morning routine one. Y'all I was so exhausted before I started and then as soon as I like did it I was like," oh, I want to do another one." I feel like my body's you know, feels a little bit better as well in my mind a little bit more at peace and at ease. (Recording #56)
- I'm like, okay, even Kobe meditates and sits in silence for 10 minutes a day and I'm like, okay, let me just try that cuz I think I'm overthinking this whole mindfulness mental meditation thing. (Recording #34)
- I can definitely tell that my focus has increased that is calming me down not getting as frustrated with some of the behaviors that my kids are doing. (Recording #34)64
- And it says something about the solar plexus solar plexus chakra opening and I read it and I was just drawn to it. I'm like, let me look up because I keep on hearing those words solar plexus. I've been hearing that a lot lately. And now, It has something to do with his chakra as well. I'm still new and learning. So I looked at it and researched it as a third chakra, and that's where, you know, it's like the center of the seven. So it's kind of the way the fire energy, where your light goes, how your energy circulates. And when it's backed up, you feel fatigued and you have digestive problems. You feel low energy because your energy is sucked either by negative energy or you're not self-caring. You feel a lack of confidence and I'm like, yo, this is exactly what I'm feeling...it also said

that it opens up powers and your magic. So I'm like, oh wow. This aligns with the main thing that I'm like, I want to open and the main thing that I'm like, you know, my concerns because of, you know, my lack of confidence with talking to adults and this next path and dissertation on my lack of confidence with people and my temper my grogginess, my stomach. All this is because like, okay, my third chakra, the solar plexus is probably clogged. (Recording #16)

- I love the fact that I can feel me getting comfortable I can feel my growth and see my growth and also the kids I think they're seeing and feeling their growth (Recording #29)
- how they thought that in my classroom they can tell that I care, that welcoming that wants them to be successful. I'm not mean I enjoy what I do. I have energy, make them feel you'll have wanted and you know a person and that made me feel good. And this is like only the first week of having them...[student] likes the mindful minute that we do just give [student] some time to like, rest (Recording #72)

Overall, the evidence produced from the study solidifies the empirical research that was the cornerstone for the investigation. Implications that influence my social emotional wellbeing have been proven to work in tandem with healing and hurting the process of wellness. On the contrary, when combating societal and personal stressors, culturally relevant mindfulness practices and Hip Hop have been effective tenants in supporting positive mental health. Data also reveals how consistency, intentionality, timeliness, and personal investment in convenient culturally relevant holistic mindfulness practices including yoga and meditation positively support overall wellbeing. These practices showed promising results for transferability within high school classroom settings if implemented through short increments of 1-5 minutes.

## Conclusion

The findings of this investigation reveal a diverse perspective on the impact that professional and personal stressors have on the well-being as a Black Queer educator me, as well as the positive influence that MBSR and HHT have in combating respectability politics. The three main themes that were curated within this study displays how various elements that influence mental health serve dually as hindrances. Almost every theme and subtheme uniquely answered the three research questions simultaneously, which further illuminates the duality of social emotional help and hindrances experienced as an educator that is uniquely positioned in the field. RQ1 investigates how stressors of respectability politics and positionality influence my wellbeing as an educator in the field. The first theme (Theme #1), cultivating and curating community through mothering, answered this question by illustrating how historic stereotypes of being motherly and steadfast are ingrained within me as a Black womxn educator, thus negatively impacting my well-being. The concept of being “matriarch mammy” future supports literature that validates how this communal mothering and support is motivation for many Black womxn educators in the field as it relates to creating liberatory spaces for all students. Theme #3 entitled, curating and cultivating holistic liberatory support spaces, speaks to RQ1 because it addresses how the act of creating a physical or mental space of freedom or peace for self or others is a mentally draining and fulfilling process. It is revealed that creating liberatory spaces can be emotionally taxing because there is an element of self-sacrifice that is involved. This is the result of wanting to support the mission of equity for all which is implicated in other research that articulates how Black womxn educators often place others before herself which causes stress that can lead to mental health complications. On the contrary, within this process, I learned how

to be intentional with supporting my social emotional wellbeing, as a result it transferred into my professional and personal spaces, including my classroom.

The second research question (RQ2) is positioned to investigate the impact and influence of culturally relevant practices and HHT in supporting positive social emotional learning. Theme #2 and Theme #3 answers this question by providing suggestions for supporting teacher SEL that supports my intersectionalities. The research revealed that representational culturally relevant interventions that involved at least 15 minutes of yoga and meditation were most effective due to the easy access of the content and practicality. This aspect of accessibility and practicality made it easy to implement intentionality and buy-in of the practices. As mentioned in chapter 2, research emphasizes the importance of having instructors or implementors of mindfulness practices that represent the demographic of its audience, especially for Black queer womxn. It is present that Hip Hop music is not solely used for enjoyment, it is used to connect and support generational relations through the commonality of Hip Hop music and culture. Within this exchange and space, it also created a sense of youthfulness within myself in the form of playfulness, unapologetic self-expression, and embracing of challenges. The concept of youthfulness that is fostered through the exchange and engagement in Hip Hop music and culture was proven to have positive implications on my wellness.

The proceeding theme #3, curating and cultivating liberatory support spaces, aids in answering RQ2. Creating spaces of freedom for self and my professional and personal community allows for unapologetic adult spaces, freedom of expression, and a place that alleviates expectations, responsibility, and respectability.

Finally, RQ 3 examines how supporting my wellbeing is transferred to create liberatory and expressive spaces within education. This evidence supports seminal research on teacher SEL

which reveals the positive impact teacher SEL has on supporting students' well-being. The research revealed that my intersectionalities of being a Black queer womxn allowed me to curate spaces for a diverse and similar population within educational and personal spaces through communication and the concept of allowing others to have their own voice in their story and the space. This voice is also extended in the form of art, including dance and music. Within the classroom, giving ownership to my students in a manner that allows them to have a say, speak without judgment, and express themselves through art, especially Hip Hop creates a liberatory space in the classroom. This is also evident in my other professional spaces and personal life. All three themes correlate together to answer the final research question. Through mothering, Hip Hop and creating a place of liberation this allows for the curation of and support of liberatory spaces for self and others.

The data from the research revealed that the core components needed to be present in educational spaces to cultivate and curate liberatory spaces is intentionality of practical SEL interventions, transferability of skills, and consistency of practices with the goal of achieving mindfulness. Particularly, when implementing effective mindfulness practices, it is important that educators prioritize intentionally designating at least 10 minutes a day for at least 3 times a week. This process creates consistency within an educator's personal practice, thus allowing for transferability into educational spaces through activities including 2-3 minutes of silence or meditation per day that can be practiced alongside students. By educators actively demonstrating and engaging in SEL initiatives with students this cultivates an environment in which the educator is leading by example. Teacher/practitioner dedication and fidelity with the SEL interventions can support student buy-in. Another critical component for creating liberatory spaces is consistency of practices with the goal of achieving mindfulness. The goal is by

achieving mindfulness, educators and students can encourage an environment that is open to diverse perspectives and identities within these spaces.

Overall, this investigation taught me that due to me being a mother figure throughout critical parts of my life, especially as an educator, the lack of youthfulness contributed to my ratchet identity. Thus, mindfulness practices and Hip Hop based environments have taught me how to be more open-minded to expressing my unapologetic self through youthfulness. This process brought forth healing from systemic or generational wounds resulting in a more authentic sense of self. The entire process of this investigation was essentially Hip Hop healing due to the nature of the process. From the holistic and representative MBSR interventions that I utilized in the examination, I gained a calmness when combating stressors that was noticeable to others within my educational and personal realms.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The final chapter of this dissertation encompasses an interpretive summary to illuminate the significance within research as it is informed by the anchor of Black Ratchet Imagination. how the study informs scholarly discourse. This chapter will begin with reiterating the content present in Chapters 1-4. Proceeding, I will provide insight as to how the major themes discovered in the research correlate and compare with the research presented in the literature review. Next, the section will provide recommendations for key stakeholders within educational spaces.

As highlighted in proceeding chapters, the purpose of this autoethnographic qualitative study is to explore the impact that culturally relevant mindfulness practices and Hip Hop therapy have on my social and emotional well-being as a ratchet Black Queer womxn educator in combating respectability politics. The investigation intends to inform research on the mental impact of lived experiences of educators with similarly situated intersectionalities. The study is grounded in Black ratchet imagination and is rooted in understanding the social emotional impact of systemic and pandemic related stressors have on Black womxn educators, thus creating a many to exit the profession. Supporting the social emotional well-being of teachers with the above intersectionalities is essential for reducing teacher retention among the population. This examination also informs future research on how implementation of HHT and MBSR can be utilized for stakeholders and students with the listed intersectionalities, as well as those that are supporters of those marginalized identities. This study aimed to evaluate the use of HHT and MBSR for educators which is a gap in research due to the implementations being used for youth in previous studies. The research questions are as follows:



1. How do my intersections of being a ratchet Black queer womxn impact my social and emotional well-being as an educator?
2. In what ways do culturally relevant practices and elements of Hip Hop therapy support the social and emotional well-being of my intersectionalities in combating respectability politics as an educator?
3. How have culturally relevant mindfulness practices and Hip Hop therapy led to liberatory educational space?

Chapter 2 of the study provided literature highlighting the impact that the pandemic has on educators, specifically Black womxn and the implications of queer identities. The chapter also highlighted the benefits of MBSR and HHT as holistic implementations to combat a decline in mental well-being. Since the pandemic, womxn were reported to be at higher risk in comparison to men, to developing symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression; but research reveals that resilience is considered a key factor for positive mental health outcomes (Matiz et al., 2020). Studies also reveal that teachers have a higher percentage of mental health challenges in comparison to others with other profession (Cohen-Fraade & Donahue, 2021) For Black womxn educators these trends are enhanced due to the an increase in job demands that they experience(Baker et al., 2021)(Metrailler & Clark, 2022). Intersectional stressors indicate a need for social emotional learning for educators in combating the enhanced layers of stress caused by having to navigate educational spaces dominated by Eurocentric perspectives that can also hinder and hurt the well-being of Black teachers. Building resilience is dependent on the social emotional support provided, in this study Hip Hop therapy and culturally relevant practices are tools implemented.

### **Comparison to Literature**

The study affirmed the literature that highlights the hindrances that Black queer women educators potentially endure as well as the positive effects of utilizing culturally relevant practices in supporting these educators. This study also aligns with how the concept of respectability politics that reenforce heterosexual norms and whiteness create unsupportive spaces for ratchet and queer identities. Creating spaces in which holistic healing through Hip Hop and consistency with mindfulness practices revealed to support social emotional wellness for self and within the educational space of the classroom. Although teacher burnout and well-being has improved in 2023 in comparison to the pandemic years, “seventy-eight percent of teachers reported experiencing at least one of the indicators of negative well-being’ (Doan et al., pg.7, 2023). Some of the indicators of poor wellbeing include poor salaries, lack of administrative and peer support, and racial discrimination with teachers of color, in particular Black.

### **“Othermother “Ing as Ratchet Healing**

When being my organic ratchet self within educational and personal spaces the components that impacted my social emotional wellbeing centered around being inhibited to reject tasks, responsibilities, or creating boundaries to support my community. Despite the joy of service within my communities, the idea of having to mother my community and self-became a detriment to my mental health. The concept of being “othermothers” is reflected in literature and this study through theme #1: cultivating and curating community through mothering and them #3:Curating and Cultivating Holistic Liberatory Support Spaces. Lee & Thomas (2022) mention how the stresses and historic obligations of being “othermothers “provides a sense of fulfillment, despite the stress that Black womxn undergo as a result. The desire to liberate community to

liberate self is prevailing in the study, but it also extended beyond the classroom. The idea that liberation for others is self-liberation also extends into personal relationships. Research reveals that Black womxn “intersectional experiences of oppression created in them a longing sense of urgency to fight for the liberation of others experiencing oppression” (Lee & Thomas, p.13,2022). My research journey revealed that my social emotional well-being was heightened when I was serving my educational, local, and personal community. The data also concluded that bearing the duty of liberating others before investing in self-resulted in poor mental well-being. My research also revealed that my comfortability within heteronormative cis-gendered woman spaces stems from my lack of trust within revealing my intersectionality that is oppositional to the norm, therefore that idea of being outed figuratively as a marginalized gendered population causes anxiety. This correlates with the research that speaks to the challenges Black queer womxn and people encounter when entering or creating space (Shaheed et al., 2022).

### **Heteronormative Discomfort**

The reality of creating a space for ratchet Black queer liberation is a challenge that is exemplified in research through theme #1-curating and cultivating community through mothering and theme #3- curating and cultivating holistic liberatory support spaces. The themes articulate that carving out spaces to express in a heteronormative and whitespaces pose a challenge of evoking feelings of having the “imposter syndrome.” Research in chapter 2 explained how this aspect causes questioning of your validity to be in spaces that are counter to my intersectionalities caused great anxiety and awkwardness due to the concept of being able to navigate spaces that do not affirm or recognize identities. Research reveals that even the process of “coming out” as a Black queer womxn can be hindering because “‘real’ narratives of Black life infrequently feature stories of Black women who are not sexually available to Black men,”

which indicates why comfortability is present in hetero, cis-gender Black womxn spaces that seek the male gaze. In my investigation my social emotional well-being shifted when encountering sexual conversations in heteronormative spaces, “me in a woman's space like, a fem woman’s space, straight, hetero femme woman's space cisgender hetero femme woman's space. I've realized that I'm very uncomfortable.”

### **Holistic Healing for Ratchet Black Teachers (Adaptability/Transferability)**

This investigation exemplified the benefits of consistent implementation of mindfulness practices that can improve overall wellness. Research shows that 46 percent of teachers reported that the mental health supports that were provided by the school or district were inadequate due to cost and accessibility (Doan et al., 2023). Based on Theme #2: Cultivating Hip Hop as Healing and Theme #3: Curating and Cultivating Holistic Liberatory Support Spaces explains how, it was discovered that cost-efficient and accessible resources including YouTube videos on mindfulness meditation, yoga, twerk yoga, dance, and other activities were utilized and shown to be effective. Being able to learn diverse SEL strategies and making it adaptable in my personal life allowed for the content to be transferable to my students when utilizing the implementations in an educational setting. The literature reveals that mindfulness practices can support social emotional well-being in diverse populations. Research reveals the impact of mindfulness practices by stating:

We found lower scores of pandemic-related distress in mindfulness practitioners compared to non-practitioners.... Importantly, increased mindfulness training during the preceding two weeks was associated with lower scores of depression and anxiety at both assessments. (Zhu et al., 2021, p.1)

When practicing mindfulness consistently and regularly, data showed an increase in positive mood. One element of mindfulness that was represented in this study is the importance of self-care to wellness. Although the prior literature does not solely address the importance of holistic care, it is emphasized as a key factor in supporting my well-being. In one study a participant echoed similar results as it relates to holistic care by stating:

The most helpful things for me have been regular check ins with myself three times a day (morning, midday, and night-time), getting fresh air and sunshine outside with a daily walk or run, doing meditation and yoga, teletherapy sessions with my counselor, and making sure I'm eating some healthy things to sustain me throughout the day. (Baker et al., 2021, p.10)

By allowing me as an educator to have autonomy of the SEL practices that I was allowed to utilize within my educational spaces supported the cultivation of liberatory spaces for healing.

### **Recommendations for Key Stakeholders**

Due to the marginalized identities and positionality of Black ratchet queer educators and youth, it is imperative to prioritize supporting the mental well-being for these populations that endure systemic adversities in educational realms. To improve methodology for research that desires to analyze the impact of culturally relevant mindfulness practices and Hip Hop Therapy should consider using mix methods and utilize more strategic and research-based measures for analyzing the data. Conducting research to find patterns requires more structure in recording data, it is recommended to record reflections and observations 3 times per day during a certain time range in which participants have personal time to speak freely. This allows for more accurate and quantitative data. For researching social emotional wellness, it is also critical to use research-based pre and post assessments that are used in psychology and social sciences. This

process can produce credible data that can be used in medical and therapeutic environments. Recommendations for policy makers, educational leadership, teacher preparation programs, and other Ratchet Black queer educators focus on prioritizing effective social emotional interventions that are accessible and flexible. The recommendations for key stakeholders within the educational spaces consists of SEL initiatives for educators, educational stakeholders, and students. Because supporting one's mental well-being while investing in the wellness of others can be a tedious job, but prioritizing fostering wellness on a school wide or district wide level can result in buy-in. Effective SEL should be encouraged for all and should be more accessible and convenient in a manner that would encourage consistency.

### **Policymakers: Invest in Inclusive Social Emotional Supports for Queer Youth**

Policymakers have the vital role of setting the tone and climate for how their youth and adults working with the youth will be treated within their educational realm. It is imperative for policies to reflect values of support, inclusion, and equity to support all students. It is recommended that policymakers revisit and ban laws that force teachers to out their students or be placed in positions in which they have the potential to be harmed. It is also important to equip educational leadership and all stakeholders with the needed knowledge to cope with severe traumas and emergencies, such as suicide ideation. Policy makers must also ban laws and policies that do not promote building equitability or inclusivity for diverse identities and intersectionality.

To promote a more welcoming, well-rounded, and global conscious students, policies must allow for an exchange of ideas and ideologies to occur while providing support if there are shortcomings. Policy makers must make more of an effort to protect children and staff of diverse identities to ensure that safety is a priority and right for all. Visibility in the curriculum is also a

right for all students, therefore it is essential for policy makers to include LBGTQIA history and culture into the curriculum to normalize diverse identities. Representation matters within education; we cannot continue to represent for the majority and alienate identities that are unfamiliar to us. It is up to the policy makers to make spaces inclusive for all.

### **Educational and Community Leadership: Conduct School and District Wide SEL**

#### **Initiations**

Educational leadership on a district and school wide level must make it essential to equip teachers with the skills needed to cope with vicarious trauma and personal trauma within the educational environment. It is suggested that school districts invest in teachers supporting their personal wellbeing by providing uninterrupted designated time for wellness each week with a stipend to assist with seeking out holistic interventions or bringing practitioners to school. Before teachers can fully commit and invest into student SEL, teachers must gain a more personal understanding of how they can bring simple practices in the classroom. Leadership can provide school and district wide training on SEL with transferable practices for students and teachers. Creating a community in which supporting wellness is a school culture can create buy-in from staff and students.

Educational leadership should also emphasize the importance of creating safe and liberatory spaces for all adults and students by providing culturally relevant diversity and inclusion training by diverse perspectives. The training should focus on understanding bias, prejudice, privileges, intersectionalities, and how these factors impact social emotional wellness. This practice can be the start in creating inclusive spaces for individuals that identify within underrepresented communities and identities. Districtwide brave space training on gender and

gender identities must be made a priority to educate all educational stakeholders.

Bringing forth community support that is representation of the queer youth are communities that are critical for cultivating healthy relationships with self-discovery and others within the community. Mentorships should be implemented to support students' growth during difficult times of finding one's identity. Leadership must extend ample resources toward creating affirming queer spaces with culturally relevant support, especially for Black queer youth. It is recommended that queer youth have support staff that specializes in mental health for queer youth and adults in supporting complexities of identity, coming out, and mental well-being.

Another recommendation is for inclusive and representative support for queer youth when in the process of transitioning or coming out into their identities. Creating spaces of support for scholars of color that is vital for supporting the social emotional wellbeing of all students and staff. Normalizing diverse lifestyles by providing representation and seeking people with lived experiences is an effective method for creating more inclusive and welcoming spaces.

Finally, Black Queer youth need an exclusive liberatory space where they can gather with mentors, community volunteers, and peers that have the same intersectionalities. Growing and discovering your Black queerness requires supportive outlets, communities, and researched-based supports. These youth also need a space to try to explore diverse outlets in spaces not normally explored due to cultural and gender restrictions. Activities to include promoting cultural awareness, financial literacy, life skills, holistic wellness and nutrition. Youth spaces must extend beyond the age of 18 to accommodate mature youth ages 18+.

**Teacher Preparation Program: Prioritize Teaching, Curating, and Self-Implementing**



It is imperative for teacher preparation programs to prioritize creating a social emotional routine prior to entering the profession. Courses on SEL for adults and the youth they will serve should be offered. Teachers should be in the forefront of creating SEL initiatives in their classrooms. The research reveals that investing in personal well-being for teachers creates liberatory classroom spaces. The study eluded that effective SEL practices or educational stakeholders and students must be practical and representative of the demographic.

Representation is necessary and recommended for effective implementation. Utilizing simple practices of HHT and MBSR simultaneously can help to build consistency and practicality with the practice, practicing daily in 5-minute increments and gradually increasing is recommended for both educators and students. Creating judgment free spaces in which educators and students can embrace their inner child and joy together. Educators are in need of adult youthful spaces of expression and release to support mental well-being. SEL and initiatives that support well-being should allow educators to practice with students and practice holistic whaling together.

Teacher preparation programs should also offer culturally relevant and diverse SEL curriculums, including Hip Hop therapy prior to teachers entering the field. SEL training should also be offered to those seeking leadership positions within schools or districts to create a culture and climate of healing for all. It is imperative to give teachers voice and autonomy to implement effective SEL that supports all diverse students. Teacher preparation programs should also encourage and engage prospective teachers in creating their own SEL plan for their class and ensure they embed it into their daily lessons. Both students and teachers need consistency within the practice. By allowing teacher preparation programs to expose teacher candidates to the SEL curriculum, this can reduce teacher burnout, attrition, and mental health concerns related to work stress.

## **Educational Practitioners**

Recommendations for educational stakeholders consist of prioritizing in creating their own practical SEL program that is tailored to meet the demands of their schedule. Allowing for transferability to occur within the classroom that uses their personal social emotional skills in the classroom by leading as example. It is imperative for practitioners to seek diverse SEL and mindfulness professional development that is accessible and provides an array of perspectives and identities.

- Seek SEL professional development on culturally relevant SEL practices and Hip Hop therapy as SEL for educational settings
- Attend diverse professional development that provides perspectives that better equip audiences with understanding Black and queer identities.
- Create time in your schedule in the mornings or evenings for at least a 15-minute mindfulness meditation and yoga a minimum of 3 days per week
- 2-10 minutes per day of silent time with yourself
- Build relationships with students by showing interest in their culture, especially music and media to build generational connections and promote relevancy
- Allow for time within the classroom for students to express without judgment.

## **Ratchet Black Queer Educators: Find and Create Places of Healing**

Recommendations for ratchet Black queer educators is simply to see and invest in your wellness. Find virtual or in-person communities that can pour into your unique needs. Review and challenge policies that are penetrating your wellbeing by seeking out allyships outside of your school or district. It is important to find a support system that is supportive of all diverse

intersectionalities, especially Black queer womxn identities. It is important to find our space of liberation, acceptance, and healing in an organic atmosphere that allows for transparency and authenticity. This support system should consist of professional and personal connections. Another recommendation is to allow yourself to let go and embrace your inner joy in childlike activities, memories, or music. If possible, find an activity that simultaneously supports your wellness in a liberatory space. Try to look outside of your comfort zone and interact in new avenues such as gaming, martial arts, getting a pet or plant, and gardening. Being in different places to release can be both a negative and positive experience, but always seek to your comfort level in any new atmosphere.

### **Future Research Possibilities**

This ethnographic study was rooted in exploring how my social and emotional well-being as an educator with unique intersectionalities, as well as holistic implementations of mindfulness and Hip Hop support combating stressors of respectability. This research can be utilized to inform future studies for youth and other educational stakeholders with similarly aligned intersections or conspirators of people with these intersecting identities. Expanding research to diverse perspectives will provide valuable insights to Black ratchet, queer, and womxn identities within educational spaces. For future research and possibilities, it is recommended that research be conducted using participatory action research and include diverse perspectives.

By diversifying the methodology of the study to participatory action research it can allow for teachers to take ownership of their social emotional wellness while supporting their students. Possible studies can also utilize mixed-methods to track the progress or decline of teacher social and emotional wellness as it is rated on a check-in scale of 1(low)-5(high) that was similar to this

study. Educational stakeholders of ratchet Black and/or queer identities across educational age ranges and higher education can evaluate mindfulness practices and Hip Hop centered activities that they participate in or have a desire to do so within their local communities. Upon completion of these activities, educational stakeholders can use what they have learned to curate an SEL curriculum that transfers for adults and youth with similar or distinct identities. Another possibility for research is for educators with polar intersectionalities to participate in diverse mindfulness practices and Hip Hop based initiatives that are led by people of color. This study has the potential to be a comparative study by evaluating their social emotional well-being before and after intervention. Participants can also be monitored over the course of time to investigate their experiences.

A suggestion for future research is to conduct interviews to investigate how ratchet Black Queer teachers impact the social and emotional well-being of students that are similarly situated and/or polarized identities. Interviews can be conducted among alumni students to gather a better understanding of how these teachers influenced their wellbeing beyond primary and secondary educational spaces. It is important to deeply analyze the impact that teachers of identities that defy respectability politics and the white gaze impact the wellbeing of the students and staff they serve. Understanding how these identities are utilized to support all diverse learning allows for a greater discourse on the influence of diverse teachers. The study can also analyze how ratchet Black queer educators influence the social and emotional well-being of staff members that are similarly aligned or co-conspirators of those with these identities.

Analyzing the formation and impact of Black ratchet queer identities is another study that can add more conversation to the discourse on how these intersectionalities influence and impact others with polarized identities and global identities. This can inform research that explores

globalized perspectives on Black culture. Another global perspective on the research is to investigate the experience of culturally diverse mindfulness instructors and their experiences within culturally diverse educational spaces. Further investigation of the formation and impact of Black queer ratchet identities over a period of time with multiple participants can offer insight into how these identities are influenced in various educational and professional spaces. By having multi step perspectives in the study, it offers more validity to these Black identities that defy westernized standards. Placing these identities outside of the United States also provides insight into the world view of ratchet Black women in global educational settings.

Taking a deeper analysis into the lives of Black ratchet queer womxn and girls and the familial/parental influence of those identities is paramount in understanding various facades of developmental and educational life. Future research should investigate the impact of parental support in Black queer spaces, especially the influence of parental and maternal figures. A Constant comparative study can also be a potential investigation into how these identities are informed and developed over time and how education impacted these identities over the k-12 and higher education realms.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This autoethnographic qualitative study seeks to spread awareness of the mental implications placed upon Black ratchet queer womxn within educational spaces by utilizing my perspective to speak to the greater phenomenon of teacher SEL. The study yielded findings that supported empirical studies that emphasize the positive outcomes of utilizing culturally relevant mindfulness-based practices and HHT. The overall study revealed that some supports that we find enriching for our mental wellbeing, such as mothering, being the representation, and

curating liberating spaces can hinder wellness. The two major takeaways that the study brings forth is practicality within SEL practices and creating spaces to harvest and support organic exchanges.

- **Intention and representation matters in mindfulness spaces** - This study proved that it is imperative to chisel out smaller increments of time to properly practice mindfulness and Hip Hop therapy to support wellbeing. As for transferability of practice into the classroom, it is necessary to make in class practices brief, approximately 1–5-minute duration of simple activities. Some of these activities include meditation (box breathing, deep breathing, sitting in silence) and brief desk or chair stretches. Using available resources including YouTube is a great avenue for bringing forth resources that can be utilized outside of the classroom. Preserving sacred space and time to invest in personal healing is crucial in supporting teacher burnout and work-related stress. As Black queer womxn, we have the generational burden of wanting to support the masses, but reclaiming your time to support yourself is a priority.
- **Everyone needs an unapologetic space of liberation for healing-** Encouraging and supporting liberatory spaces for students and adults is essential for creating a community of acceptance of all diverse intersectionalities. It is critical for these spaces to be free of judgmental gaze and representative of the population; as well as exposure to diverse populations and intersectionalities. Allowing for a space where students and teachers can embrace their vulnerabilities and freedoms can create an impactful educational experience for all learners.

With research on social emotional wellness on the rise, it is important to gear research toward social emotional interventions for teachers of diverse identities. Utilizing culturally relevant

practices and Hip Hop therapy to foster organic connection to mindfulness and wellness are possible solutions that can support Black queer womxn and girls within the realm of education and psychological health. Using Hip Hop as healing or other culturally relevant practices, finding community, and making SEL accessible and timely is critical for teachers to buy-in to wellness in a way that makes it transferable in the classroom. Due to the intricate intersectionalities that race, and gender identity play in everyday stressors, it is a priority for policy makers and educational leadership to provide relevant resources when coping with this stress. It is also important to note that many Black queer teachers have limited space in which they can be their unapologetic self, therefore it is essential for policymakers to incorporate training that supports making safe, liberatory, and healing spaces for marginalized identities that defy respectability politics. This can inform a plethora of identities that are polarized of white heteronormative perspectives, as well as be a resource for co-conspirators of individuals with diverse identities.

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## APPENDIX A: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TIMELINE WRITING PROMPT 5.1

### Prompt 5.1-pg.157 (Chang,157)

[illegible]

## APPENDIX B: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TIMELINE EXAMPLE

Year/age	Event	Song/Album/Playlist associated with memory/time frame
1997/9 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4th Grade</li> <li>• Started Kung Fu and stayed until middle school almost reached black belt</li> </ul>	Got in trouble for bringing a rolling stone magazine to school with the hot boys on it
1998/ 10 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5th Grade</li> <li>• Grandad(mom's dad) transitioned</li> <li>• Loved barbies</li> <li>• Best friend was Tiffany Greene</li> <li>• Did a Black History Cut Out board project on Erykah Badu</li> </ul>	Spice Girls EVERYTHING Erykah Badu  The Hot Boys
1999/ 11 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6th grade</li> <li>• Mom was Pregnant with Tyler( 1st sibling)</li> <li>• Tyler(1st sibling) was born</li> </ul>	Got my first "Parental Advisory" CD's Siso (unleash the dragon and Cam'Ron Oh Boy)



## APPENDIX C: CHANG'S WRITING PROMPTS

**Place of Significance Chang Writing Prompt 5.2**

**Prompt:** Select a time cycle—annual, seasonal, weekly, or daily—that you want to focus on. List chronologically activities and/or events in which you participate regularly within this time cycle. Identify each item with the time framework (i.e., going to school at 7:00 am, going to church on Sunday, family visit in July/August, etc.). Briefly describe the context of such routines. Select one and describe it in detail.

**Rituals Chang Writing Prompt 5.4**

**Prompt:** List five personal, familial, or social rituals, in order of importance, in which you have participated. Briefly describe the context of each ritual. Select the most important one and describe it in detail in terms of who, when, where, what, and how. Explain why it is important in your life.

**Torie's Tweak/thoughts:** Ask my parents what rituals and routines we had I can not think of any.

**Mentors Chang Writing Prompt 5.5**

**Prompt:** List five mentors in order of importance, who have made significant impacts on your life and briefly describe who each person is. Select one and explain how this person has influenced you.

**Torie's Tweak:** Select more than one person that is influential and explain their influence. This is important to me because all the people that influenced me are equally impactful to my being. Also have critical conversations with parents to see if I had mentors.

**Place of Significance Writing Prompt 5.8**

**Prompt:** Select a place of significance that helps you gain an understanding of yourself and your relationship to others. Draw the place, putting in as many details as possible. You may outline the place or do a realist drawing. Identify objects and persons in the drawing when necessary. Expand this exercise to additional places. Describe the place and explain why this place is significant to you.

**Torie's Tweak/thoughts:** Visit these places when I go back home and record my feelings and thoughts, if possible.

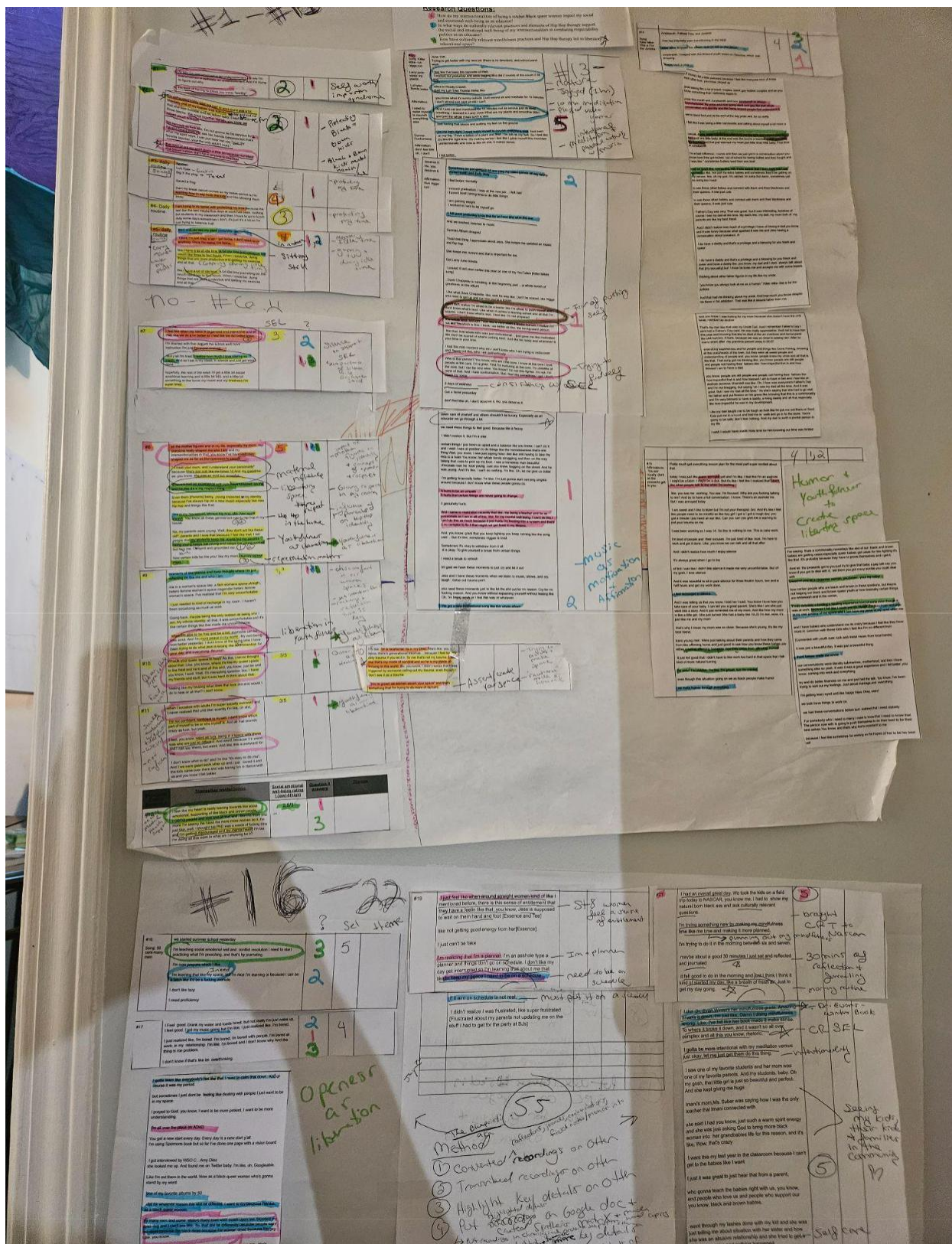
**Example:**

## APPENDIX D: CRITICAL CONVERSATION GUIDE QUESTIONS

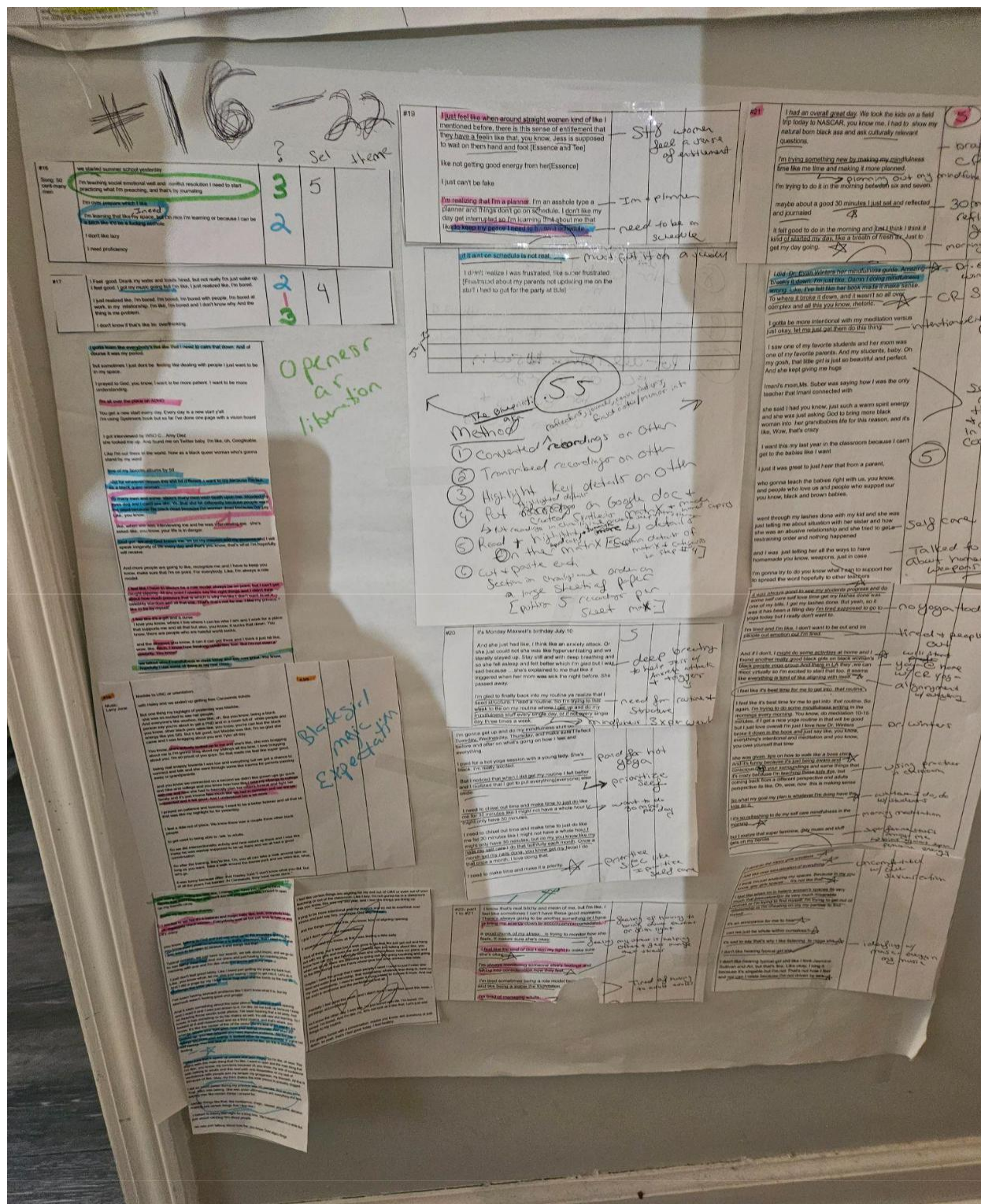
- 1) How do you identify (gender, age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation etc.)
- 2) What is your relationship with me and how do we know each other?
- 3) How long have you known me?
- 4) Describe a time when I used MBSR and elements of Hip Hop to support the SEL of yourself?
- 5) Tell me about a time when I used MBSR and elements of Hip Hop to support the SEL of your peer or colleague
- 6) How do you think my identity as a ratchet Black queer womxn educator influences my students/ colleagues?
- 7) What impact do you think Ms. Wheatley' has on her students SEL through her intersectionalities?
- 8) Tell me about a time when you believed I was feeling my "best" mentally, how did that inform my teaching?
- 9) What is a memory of me in which I presented my best or impacted me?

- ### Research Questions:

- [illegible]







## APPENDIX G: DATA DIVE DOCUMENT

### Research Questions:

1. How do my intersectionalities of being a ratchet Black queer womxn impact my social and emotional well-being as an educator?
2. In what ways do culturally relevant practices and elements of Hip Hop therapy support the social and emotional well-being of my intersectionalities in combating respectability politics as an educator?
3. How have culturally relevant mindfulness practices and Hip Hop therapy led to liberatory educational space?

[illegible]

# APPENDIX H: EVANS-WINTER'S MINDFULNESS CHART PROMPT

Recording/ Prompt Name or #	Themes/key words/Quotes	Social emotional well- being rating 1(low)-5(high)	Question it answers	Themes
#12	I feel like my heart is really leaning towards like social emotional, supporting of like black and brown people, LGBTQ people and kids and all that and I like the more and more I'm seeing the need the more more women do it. I'm just like, well, I thought his PhD was a waste of fucking time and I'm getting discouraged and my mental health I'm like I'm doing all this work to what am I showing for it?	2.5/3	1	
#11	<p>when I socialize with adults I'm super socially awkward and I never realized that until like recently I'm like, oh shit,</p> <p>I'm not confident, confident in myself. I don't know which part of myself to be or who myself is. And all that sounds crazy as fuck, but yeah,</p> <p>I feel, you know, weird as fuck being in a space with these kids who are just so different. And weird, because I'm weird and I can say Weird, but weird. And like, this is awkward for me.</p> <p>I don't know what to do" and I'm like "it's okay to do you". And I we were gasin each other up and I just I loved it and the kids came over there and was having fun to dance with us and you know I felt better.</p>	3/5	1	
#10	<p>What is your queer space to heal? As like, I never thought about that. Like, you know, where it's like my queer space to like heal and vent and all this and, you know, just be and you know, I said, Well, it's interesting question like, I have my friends and stuff, but it was hard to think about that.</p> <p>healing like my healing what does that look like and would I do to heal or all that? I don't know.</p>	3/5	1	

## APPENDIX I: IRB APPROVAL FORM



**To:** Torie Wheatley  
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

**From:** IRB

**Approval Date:** 11-Sep-2023

**Expiration Date of Approval:** No Date of Expiration - No End Date

**RE:** Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)

**Submission Type:** Initial Application

**Expedited Category:** 5~6~7

**Study #:** IRB-23-0975

**Study Title:** #RatchetQueerTeacher: Social, Emotional Well-being and Liberation Through Mindfulness and Hip Hop Therapy

This submission has been approved by the IRB. It has been determined that the risk involved in this research is no more than minimal. The approval has no expiration or end date and is not subject to an annual continuing review. However, you are required to obtain approval for all changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented and to comply with the Investigator Responsibilities detailed below. This includes submitting a progress report (Administrative Check-In) at requested time points. Carefully review the Investigator Responsibilities listed below.

Your approved consent forms and other documents are available online at [Submission Page](#).