

Article

“Wholeness Is No Trifling Matter”: Toward an Epistemology of Care, Touch, and Celebration in Education

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Abstract: The authors argue that embracing life necessitates a shift in how we conceptualize wellness in education. They delve into the exploration of humanizing wellness and living well by drawing on Black onto-epistemologies, specifically referencing Bambara’s *The Salt Eaters*. This exploration involves examining how notions of wholeness manifest in the text and the subsequent implications for educators and scholars actively involved in anti-equity efforts. The authors elucidate both the possibilities and challenges related to care, touch, and celebration. In particular, they employ the concept of Black refusal to investigate how these elements can propel a critical departure from conventional ideas of wellness in the United States, paving the way for alternative modes of existence which prioritize wholeness. To achieve this, the authors present an exploration of the literature on whiteness, epistemology, and the destructive impact of anti-Blackness. The authors then introduce Black refusal as a theoretical framework, which functions as the frame guiding their methods. Examining personal reflective instances of engagement with the present political landscape, analyzing Bambara’s *The Salt Eaters*, and maintaining refusal as a central theoretical framework, the authors detail an epistemology of wholeness centered on care, touch, and celebration.

Keywords: wholeness; epistemology; care; touch; celebration; political threats



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1. Introduction

For Bambara [1] wholeness is marked by decision and actualized by a set of conditions. In the opening pages of *The Salt Eaters* [1], Black feminist writer and creative Toni Cade Bambara introduces readers to Velma Henry. A veteran of the Black Power movement and the women’s movement in her region, Henry is a longtime community activist. Readers learn that Henry is in the community hospital to receive treatment and support. Henry’s longtime political work in the community has taken a toll on her psyche, body, and spirit, manifesting in angst and exhaustion. Henry’s predicament is consistent with the experiences of Black equity scholars, where exacting epistemic stressors threaten the health and livelihood of Black living, rendering them susceptible to poor health, if not premature death, a condition which Durham discussed as walking wounded. That is, Black equity scholars are not immune to the racialized violence of the social context, as higher education in particular has long played a sociocultural role in the struggle for and about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) (e.g., affirmative action; political protest; the emergence of Black studies), but it is too a site wherein Black scholars experience racialized stress and trauma, and fatigue, as they confront anti-Black policies and practices.

It is in this place of “walking wounded” [2] that Henry encounters Minnie Ransom, a healer. For many in the community, Minnie is unorthodox in her healing practice, as she is guided by a set of ethics which calls for a shift in how one understands healing before the practice of healing can begin. Minnie asks directly “Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well? ... Just so you’re sure, sweetheart, and ready to be healed, cause

wholeness is no trifling matter” [1] (p. 1). This question undergirds Durham’s [2] similarly convicting question of healing that asked “what does it mean to live? To live fully? To live as human?” (p. 28). We take seriously this question of the human and believe that the question of the human is not the matter of a specific policy or practice so much as it is an epistemic ordering that normalizes patterns of anti-Blackness in education contexts [3,4]. Thus, this manuscript thinks with Bambara and Durham on the central matter of wellness in the throes of epistemic violence. Specifically, we pursue an epistemic departure by critiquing normative patterns and then discussing what it means to *refuse* those patterns by turning to Black onto-epistemological thought, asking what is the sound, look, and feeling of an epistemology of wholeness in educative spaces?

We believe, as Durham [2] does, that “choosing life—means we must labor differently” (p. 28). Thus, we consider what it means to humanize wellness or live well by thinking with Black onto-epistemologies, particularly Bambara’s [1] *The Salt Eaters*, about the ways in which wholeness comes to bear in the text and the implications therein for educators and scholars engaged in anti-equity warfare. Here, we clarify the potentialities and challenges to care, touch, and celebration as these themes surfaced as essential elements in Black onto-epistemological formations of wellness. We understand Black onto-epistemological formations as the multiple and varied methods that Black people deploy to make meaning of their existence in the world, including, but not limited to, literature, music, and spiritual communion. On these terms, Bambara’s treatment of care, touch, and celebration in *The Salt Eaters* informs our theorizing. More specifically, we deploy Black refusal to explore how notions of care, touch, and celebration might advance a critical departure from notions of wellness in the United States’ social imaginary toward other ways of being that consider wholeness. To accomplish this, we offer a brief review of the literature on whiteness, epistemology, and how Blackness violently unsettles/ed both concepts. From there, we discuss Black refusal [5] as a theoretical framework and entry point into our methods and findings. We use duoethnography as a research approach to bring the realities of Black scholars encountering a specific socio-political moment and context to the fore and attempt to anchor those realities in the longer tradition of Black thought by juxtaposing our experiences with the writings of Black scholars who wrote explicitly about Black wellness praxis. This latter choice explains our decision to use *The Salt Eaters*.

2. Literature Review

In preparation for this manuscript, we engaged five areas of the literature: whiteness, epistemic violence, care, touch, and celebration. We provide our synthesis of these in two categories—whiteness and epistemic violence; and care, touch, and celebration—as we think through and offer a fusion of the latter as necessary for our current educational climate.

3. Whiteness and Epistemic Violence

Whiteness is, among other things, an epistemic project [4] that structures what might be understood as the current order of knowledge. As a way of knowing, it materialized as the confluence of anti-Blackness and coloniality wherein the question of the human, and humanness more broadly, would settle on one’s proximity to whiteness. Here, to grapple with Black existence in and against political antagonisms is to consider how Western humanism gets deployed as a particular type of anti-Black violence, concerned with legitimizing what can be thought and who can contribute to legible forms of knowledge. In this way, the brand of constraint we bring attention to in this review is that of epistemic violence.

Dotson [6] discussed epistemic violence as a communicative constraint that surveils knowledge production, dissemination, and reception. This violence aims to discipline society and, in this context, educators and scholars into particular ways of knowing and being. As a socialization project, epistemic violence is both external and internal and works in tandem toward testimonial quieting and smothering [6]. In response to external threats or to the racialized monitoring of language, practice, and activities, individuals truncate their testimonies in a manner befitting the order of knowledge. That is, epistemic projects,

like current anti-equity legislation, overdetermine educators' and scholars' speech practices. Okello [7] extending this discussion, clarified epistemic asphyxiation as being specific to Black educators and scholars and the effort to control Black knowledge production.

Epistemic asphyxiation is a process of forcing submission that becomes self-reinforcing. Conceptually, the idea indexes the principles of a chokehold [8]. Just as the chokehold justifies pressure because of noncompliance, the body cannot completely control itself because it is lodged in a vice grip. As such, there can be no reasoned responses because the body is in violation with every movement. On these terms, epistemic asphyxiation ensures that Black educators and scholars are brought into compliance. Exploring how whiteness functioned to terrorize Black onto-epistemologies by examining the various racialized scripts which consume Black scholars, Okello [7] referred to epistemic asphyxiation as the rationalized attempt to restore a normative pattern of breathing, that is, coherence to a white western epistemological idea. Whereas the order of knowledge [4] threatens Black knowledge production, thoughts, ideas, knowing, and being toward normativity [9], propelled all the more by policy antagonisms concerned with the seizure of critical thought, Black onto-epistemologies militate against these forces through refusal.

The literature on whiteness and epistemic violence is relevant to this article and the resulting theorization we offer because both whiteness and epistemic violence—however manifested—contribute to the harms, negative health outcomes, and deleterious lived experiences of Black scholars, students, leaders, and staff in every educational context. For example, whether it is the suicide of Dr. Antoinette “Bonnie” Candia-Bailey of Lincoln University under the leadership of a white man at the helm of a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) [10], the maligning and forced resignation from the presidency of Dr. Claudine Gay of Harvard University [11,12], or the forced resignation from the presidency of Dr. Jason Wingard of Temple University [13] the lived experiences of Black leaders in higher education demonstrate the harms of whiteness and epistemic asphyxiation. Similarly, in K-12, we witness the weaponization of schooling. For instance, whether it is school policies related to hair which deprive a Black student of learning [14,15], a school principal joking about calling the police and falsely telling them a Black special-needs student has a gun [16], the proliferation of book banning significantly impacting Black authors' work [17] or a state-sanctioned school curriculum which seeks to espouse the “benefits of slavery” [18] K-12 experiences reflect the significant harms of whiteness and epistemic asphyxiation.

Against this background, we synthesize this literature and frame how a fusion of care, touch, and celebration may help as a form of refusal in and beyond the current educational climate. First, for the purposes and parameters of this manuscript, we do not challenge the scholarship on whiteness and epistemic violence, as the literature and news stories on the educational experiences of Black people, for example, including in the current sociopolitical schooling context, corroborate the longstanding and extensive research that chronicles whiteness and epistemic violence [19,20]. In fact, in this paper, we center the perspectives of Black scholars and journalists who have accounted for and contributed to the various links between conversations in the academic fields and journalism, which, together, underscore the persistence of both whiteness and epistemic harms. Admittedly, there are several nuances and additional details that this paper does not allow us to delve into. However, it is precisely because of the related threads across the scholarly literature, journalistic reports, and lived experiences that we begin to conceptualize the critical importance, in education, of care, touch, and celebration as acts of refusal given the ever-persistent anti-Black and anti-equity environment that is being ramped up through recent legislation, political machinations, and significant funding.

4. Care, Touch, and Celebration

The literature on care, touch, and celebration is disparate and frequently discipline-specific. For the purpose of framing this paper, we explored the literature and provide the following brief synthesis. Much of the literature on care is in healthcare (e.g., [21–23]).

Despite the primacy of the discourse on care in healthcare contexts, care has also been discussed in education from the lenses of ethics and practice. In the context of educational leadership, Starratt [24,25] framed a three-dimensional framework, discussed as an ethics of care, critique, and justice, that later fueled further discourse about ethical educational leadership (e.g., [26,27]). Relatedly, Noddings [28] is also renowned for focalizing the idea of care in education. She underscored care as the central and most significant role of schools. Her work has sustained this focus on care as the crux of schooling (e.g., [29,30]).

Notably, Starratt [24] helps us understand that an ethic of care is situated in relationality and not contractuality or legality. Instead, an ethic of caring is “from a standpoint of absolute regard” (p. 195). Thus, as he aptly delineates,

This ethic places the human persons-in-relationship as occupying a position for each other of absolute value; neither one can be used as a means to an end; each enjoys an intrinsic dignity and worth, and given the chance, will reveal genuinely loveable qualities. An ethics of caring requires fidelity to persons, willingness to acknowledge their right to be who they are, an openness to encountering them in their authentic individuality, a loyalty to the relationship. . . it postulates a level of caring that honors the dignity of each person and desires to see that person enjoy a fully human life. [24] (p. 195)

This rich acknowledgment of how an ethic of care coheres with our experiences with each other will be developed later in this manuscript. Critically, as we argue herein, Starratt [24] underscored that “it is in relationship that the specifically human is grounded; isolated individuals functioning only for themselves are but half persons. One becomes whole when one is in relationship with another and with many others” (p. 195). It is this conception of care that informs our efforts in this manuscript—care as an ethical relational groundedness.

School leaders and scholars have continued to inquire into the ways these various conceptions of care show up or are missing from schools in various national and international contexts [31–33], including as evidenced in a recent dissertation (see, [34]). Similarly, higher education literature has also been engaging in this discourse about an ethic of care, particularly in promoting student learning and success and not being overrun by big data demands [35,36]. Together, the literature on care in both K-12 and higher education overwhelmingly corroborates that caring is critical, relationships require authentic engagement, and schooling currently, both in K-12 and postsecondary contexts, is too often devoid of or transactionally and superficially reflecting both.

There is less about human touch framed favorably in the literature pertinent to education. This might be, in part, because of particular conceptions of touch as well as concerns about violations of personal space, predatory conduct, harassment, and assault related to the use of the word “touch,” especially with the no-touch discourse in K-12 but also pointedly in postsecondary institutions [37–39]. Nevertheless, there is evidence that touch is crucial in human life and well-being [40–43]. And it is upon this cruciality that we draw to inform what we propose, as will be evidenced further in our extrapolation of Bambara’s [1] *The Salt Eaters* and its pertinence during this current anti-equity climate for touch as part of an epistemology of wholeness.

The literature on celebration in education often centers on the celebration of holidays, heritage months, to some extent, student learning and growth, and other milestones [44,45]. There is much less regarding the celebration of one’s humanity and dignity in education [46,47], though there seems to be some shifting developments in this direction, notably since the COVID-19 pandemic, for example [48]. Taken together, the reviewed literature on care, touch, and celebration, as it currently exists, reflects silos that implicate intentional and explicit exploration and development of an interdisciplinary epistemology that fuses the three in education. It is this implication and the current climate’s imperative that compel our inquiry, reflections, and actions for our own survival and the survival of others while under attack in education.

5. Theoretical Framework

We turn to the refusal as a theoretical framework because, as mentioned above, breaking from Western epistemological ideals demands a shift in *how* people and organizations think about wholeness, not necessarily *what* they do, i.e., a change in practices. Refusal, as articulated by Campt [5] and echoed by a collective of scholars and artists including Saidiya Hartman and Simone Leigh, can be interpreted as the expressed longing for a comprehensive and expansive framework and vocabulary for “theorizing everyday practices of struggle often overshadowed by an emphasis on collective acts of resistance” [49] (para. 2). Embracing refusal as a conceptual framework signifies a pressing reorientation of the self in relation to temporal and spatial dimensions; it extends an invitation to formulate fresh terms that could steer individual and societal ethics, politics, activism, and theoretical discourse. Refusal transcends mere actions and choices; its essence lies in its epistemological departure from the accepted norm of what is considered livable. In this sense, refusal draws from Black onto-epistemological thought, which has explored transforming not only what is known but also how it is known. More precisely, the conditions of refusal demonstrate how Western humanism has been the guiding framework for shaping society and how it is intertwined with ways of comprehending and existing that place undue emphasis on rationality, objectivity, and linearity as means of communication and knowledge generation [4].

Commitments to Western humanism establish hierarchies and divisions that dictate the hierarchy of knowledge. Put differently, the prevailing Western, United States epistemic norms rely on modalities like reason, science, history, capitalism, and gender, all in an attempt to establish the validity of truth. This onto-epistemological status quo partly underpins the concept of refusal; however, refusal cannot be reduced to a set of strategies of opposition. The essence of refusal does not lie in resistance; instead, it resides in the creation of alternative possibilities amid negation. It is the rejection of that which renders one out of place, unintelligible, while being cognizant of the necessary transformations for a more complete existence. In other words, refusal provides the theoretical foundation for living the future in the present, experimenting with ways of being, essentially forming the basis for Black futurity. As Campt [5] proposed, “the grammar of black feminist futurity is a performance of a future that hasn’t yet happened, but must . . . [it] is the power to imagine beyond current fact and to envision that which is not, but must be” (p. 17). The realms of refusal encompass decisions to “reject the terms of diminished subjecthood with which one is presented, using negation as a generative and creative source of disorderly power to embrace the possibility of living otherwise” [49] (para 2).

Theorizing the practices of refusal, in the vein of Black onto-epistemological thought, as creation within confined spaces [50], unanchored, wandering [51], and enacting alternative ways of being [52], is to take up refusal as more than an intellectual endeavor. The endeavor to theorize refusal is also corporeal, entailing engagement with the mind, spirit, psyche, and environment.

6. Methodological Approach

We deploy a duoethnography [53] to consider what it has meant for two Black critical scholars to work in and against anti-equity legislative conditions, asking what is the sound, look, and feeling of an epistemology of care, touch, and celebration in educative spaces? When theorizing with refusal, the intentional focus of the question is to lift affective capacities as being essential for understanding what it means to exist deeply. Following duoethnographic methods and, in particular, our intent on examining the function of power and oppression and the ways in which they come to bear on the two scholars’ lives, we engage in purposeful dialogue as they grapple with text and artifacts of investigation. Moreover, we move alongside the genealogy of Black onto-epistemological thought, namely, Bambara’s [1] *The Salt Eaters*, to amplify the utility of Black Okello’s [54] considerations on how Black writers intentionally direct their writing and theorizing toward Black people and communities. More specifically, we juxtapose their duoethnographic reflections with

a Black feminist literary analysis [55–57] to locate emergent ideas about wholeness in the interpretations of Black thought and literature.

7. Positionalities

We identify as scholars who are Black cisgender men and “citizens” of the United States. The first author was born in the US of immigrants from the continent of Africa. The second author was born in the Caribbean and immigrated to the US. Both of us received our first tenure-track appointments in the same department and institution, with author two joining the department two years after author one. While author one has changed institutions, author two is at the same institution, and we have continued our professional relationship and strengthened our research partnership.

Notably, as scholars, we have different but complementary and interconnected backgrounds. For instance, author one has a background in Black studies and higher education, and author two has a background as an educator in K-12 and higher education. We both have backgrounds in literary analysis. Our individual and collective social locations as Black, as Black cisgender men, as scholars, and as “citizens” of the US, therefore, significantly inform our ways of being, knowing, and living. Thus, we employ a decidedly Black critical lens in this manuscript and draw on the scholarship of Black feminists significantly in this article and our work.

Further, as Black educators in both K-12 and postsecondary institutions for decades, we draw on our depth and breadth of knowledges and experiences to reflect on the current climate and offer the conceptual framework we introduce in this manuscript. Specifically, as faculty on the tenure track during this tenuous time in education, we are acutely aware of the harms being exacted and are intricately impacted by so many aspects of the anti-equity work being carried out across the nation. To this end, we embarked on a project that would both enable us to process everything that this moment is bringing up for us personally and professionally and what it might mean for others—particularly Black people—education during this phase of the long now.

8. Methods

As an entry point into the discussion, we individually journaled on the following prompt: What are the affective and embodied ways we are experiencing anti-equity warfare? After journaling individually, we shared our reflections a week ahead of our meeting together. We then came together as a pair to discuss our reflections. We recorded our video meeting via Zoom, and, after the session, we submitted the video for transcription. In this way, we had both the conversation transcript and Zoom recording. The following week, we came back together with the expectation that we had each performed a round of analysis utilizing the refusal framework. To begin our discussion, we took turns reading our reflections aloud. While one person read, the other listened. After reading aloud, we discussed how we understood what was shared.

In what follows, we provide a review of *The Salt Eaters*, followed by an analysis of the text through the lens of refusal. Next, we reflect on how they are encountering the socio-political moment of anti-equity legislation. In the reading of Bambara [1], we then used patterned coding and memo writing [58] to assist us in drawing out considerations for an epistemology of care, touch, and celebration.

9. The Salt Eaters’ Analysis

At its core, *The Salt Eaters* [1] is concerned with the politics of wholeness, healthy regard, and what it means to be in and against an anti-Black racist society. Bambara locates notions of wellness in the complex and multidimensional lives of the characters she writes into being and the relationships that those characters share in a community. There is, for each character in the text, an urgent need to experience care, compassion, kindness, respect for oneself and their community, and love. The tension, however, for most is how to participate in one’s well-being in ways that might sustain the self. This tension is

particularly salient for Velma Henry. Gumbs [59], writing about the protagonist Henry, noted her relational importance to the community, writing “she is a champion for the people. She is a revolutionary artist who can’t sleep. . . who literally does not rest, because she believes to create any space of comfort for herself is to distract from the urgency of her works” (para. 5).

Velma Henry does not stop, rest, until circumstances demand that she does so, and it is at that moment that readers are introduced to Henry, encircled by a community of healing—ancestors, friends, family, deities. The questions of urgency and accountability are, thus, introduced and complicated. That is, as wholeness is often framed and pursued as a project self (care) which emphasizes Western notions of well-being (Blinded for peer-review), one can come to internalize whiteness, which advances modes of being which work against Black being in a Western, United States context. In the text, Bambara ushers readers into what Quashie [60] discussed as a Black world. A Black world names an “aesthetic imaginary that encompasses heterogeneity” (p. 11) that draws inspiration from Black feminist theorizing and praxis. It is a form of imagining that locates political and philosophical contributions in the specificity of Black women’s theorizing and, in this case, Bambara’s text. *The Salt Eaters* [1], as a Black world, thus, issues the reminder that to live as Black (and female) and in anti-Black world is “comprehensive enough to manifest totality” [60] (p. 11), to offer insight and particularities of wholeness. We want to think of this Black world, then, as epistemology, as informing how one knows what they know.

Thematically, as the text puts forth important questions about the terrain of wholeness, it does so from the place of Blackness, whereas Blackness—Black onto-epistemologies—have something to say about how to be whole, about what wholeness is. Writing in and of a Black world, Bambara suggests and puts into motion diverse effective modalities for rescripting assumptions about the practice of healing and wholeness, such as the following:

telepathy and other psychic phenomena; astrology; dream analysis; numerology; colorimetry; the Tarot; past life glances and reincarnation; the Ouija board; reading auras, palms, tea leaves, cards, and energy maps; throwing cowrie shells; herbal and folk medicines; voices, visions, and signs; witches, loas, swamphags; saints, djinns, and divas; the ‘ancient wisdoms’; the power of prayer; ‘root men . . . conjure women . . . obeah folks’; divination; demons; and so on. [61] (p. 220)

Bambara’s visioning brings often antithetical methods into conversation as being interconnected, or, as Gumbs noted, “Everything is relevant. Everything is connected” [59] (para. 3). *The Salt Eaters* [1] makes explicit that personal (e.g., physical, spiritual well-being), political, and sociopolitical wholeness (e.g., well-being of the community) are relational, essential parts of a larger whole. Minnie’s urgent question to Velma, that opened this manuscript and Bambara’s book, about the sureness of her desire to be well, is indicative of the interrelatedness that drives the text. Here, as noted by Hull [61], Velma and Minnie occupy the orbiting center of the text, and, from that position, the threads web out, holding a place and weaving links between everything and everybody. At the same time, this center is a nexus that pulls the outside in, setting up the “dialectic of connectedness” [61] (p. 217). Readers are ushered into a series of relationships, critical connections, that function as the connective tissue of the text.

Hovering about as the backdrop of the narrative is the town of Claybourne and, more specifically, the ecological environment that undergirds the lives and ways of knowing and being in relation throughout the town. Indeed, there is a haunting, or what Sharpe [62] has discussed as the weather, that is borne out individually and communally. The weather is the totality of an ecology; it is the always anti-Black presence that one might describe as the climate of a region or place. The weather as the climate of Claybourne can be understood, too, as the afterlife of slavery and the accompanying logics that reinforce the brutality of enslavement and coloniality. The weather, as described here, “necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is the atmospheric condition of the time and place; it produces new ecology” [62] (p. 106).

Claybourne, as a stand-in for anti-Black ecologies, thus, transforms Black being, raising important questions about what one might need to know and be able to perform in the wake of the ever-present weather conditions. That is, when the only certainty is the predictability of death and dying, what do Black people need to know, and, more pointedly, how do they need to know? Commenting on Claybourne's anti-Black conditions, Bambara [1] wrote, "They're connected. Whose community do you think they ship radioactive waste through, or dig up waste burial grounds near? Who do you think they hire for the dangerous dirty work at those plants? . . . you think there's no connection" to "the quality of life in the city, region, country, world" (pp. 242–243). An analysis of *The Salt Eaters* [1] using the lens of refusal, and specifically the relations through which readers come to understand Velma, engenders nuance for an epistemology of wholeness, namely, care, touch, and celebration. In what follows, we offer a review of each theme as it is expressed in the text, before thinking about the potentialities of this epistemology in education contexts.

10. Care

Care, as it is staged in the text, is part of what it means to be in relation. One surmises from the various formations that take place through and around Velma that care is a verb of relation. Care might be defined as having a personal stake or interest in a thing/situation. Care is linked to concern, to be invested in a matter. As a noun, it is indicative of effort and conscientiousness, meticulous, diligent behavior, and having particularity or attention to detail. Juxtaposed with notions of care as prudence and regard, care is also a synonym for control or custody, as in to be in the care of the state. This formation of care as safekeeping, watchfulness, and supervision uneasily sits alongside versions of tenderness and right regard. In the wake of anti-Black disregard, racialized and state-imposed surveillance, the state acting out as legislation and strict supervision (read: dangerously incomplete curricular patterns), reform is casted as care. Care as a relational verb that might respond to anti-Black weather conditions asks, "how can we think care laterally, in the register of the intramural, in a different relation than that of the violence of the state?" [62] (p. 20). Care, as an alternative to state imposition, is a living tenderness and a way of looking, of being with, of tarrying, that is filled with regard, coupled with a deep knowing, a recognition of the ways in which it is harmful to be in the world; it is the responsibility of accompaniment.

Care as bearing with or the responsibility of accompaniment is expressed in a number of ways across the text. Readers come to understand that Velma is unable to achieve a moment of breakthrough without the fervor of Minnie's practice. She is, in fact, in the infirmary with Minnie because she could not will herself to keep going alone. Centrally, thus, the achievement of a breakthrough is possible through a generous and informed approach to care giving, one that labors with an individual before, during, and through their various processes. Laboring with as care, as it is used in the text, acknowledges the work required of someone to be well, just as it exemplifies how one is able to consider wellness through the support of others. Minnie, as a guide and partner in the process, is instructive. She notes "Took heart to flat out decide to be well and stride into the future sane and whole. And it took time. So, the old timers and the circle concentrated on their work, and of course patients argued, fought, resisted" [1] (p. 108). Here, Minnie is compelling Velma to consider an alternative way of being and, in doing so, invites her into versions of possibility that may only be taken up by expanding how one knows how to be well. That is, some renditions of care are attached to immediacy and cursory examinations that intend to quell one's pain or discomfort. A more expansive rendering of care that is connected to wholeness invites more intentional questions about what one needs, "holds", and, in turn, must release.

11. Touch

In a material sense, touch may be understood as that which can be identified and defined by its texture, form, and substance. Within this particular orientation, touch is empirically verified by bringing a bodily part into contact with something; it is to perceive

through the tactile sense; touch is the act of handling or feeling gently, usually with the intent to understand or appreciate or communicate; touch, in this way, is adornment, to get in close connection to or with; touch is to be tangent to. There is also an understanding of touch that regards affect or concern, as in touch is to be in relation to, to have an influence on, to influence or leave an impression. Concerning the latter, the ontological essence of touching and being touched is to know that what can be real, at times, is beyond the material, disconnected from the tactile, perceptible, or tangible. Normative frames of wholeness administered by medical practitioners tend to frame touch as a method for diagnosis toward medical treatment. Touch under these parameters is institutionalized and closed off to formations of touch that do not align with physician models of care that frame the doctor and patient relationship. Touch, however, as refusing the limitations of Western epistemological frames of diagnosis can describe forms of encounter and the many ways in which we may experience the world. As a way of knowing, touch (or touching) is a form of labor [63]. Following Camp [63] it is an “active form of struggle. It is the struggle to remain in relation to, contact or connection with another” (p. 103). The labor of touch, as a form of feeling across which acknowledges the differences between positions, is a matter working to stay in relationship with those imperiled by precarity.

Bambara [1] theorizes and writes out an epistemology of touch as a form of labor that first appears materially before blossoming as a way of knowing. She wrote “Over the years, it became routine: simply placed her left hand on the patient’s spine and her right on the navel, then clearing the channels, putting herself aside, she became available to a healing force no one had yet, to her satisfaction, captured in a name” (p. 46). In a Western epistemological sense, Minnie appears to be replicating clinical procedures and interventions, but readers quickly learn that Minnie is not interested in what she can extract through an analysis as determined by the white gaze. Her interest is in intimate connection. In the text, touch as a medium of relation that moves with and toward self-reflexive praxis echoes from the question Minnie puts forth to Velma when stating “There’s nothing that stands between you and perfect health, sweetheart. Can you hold that thought?...Can you afford to be whole? Can you afford it, is what I’m asking you, sweetheart” (p. 106). Here, Minnie is gesturing toward a labor of feeling that is proximate, vulnerable, and intimate. It is beyond alienation, which assumes that one must carry out something for the self in isolation; instead, it is a bearing with that motions for wholeness as something that is achieved in communion.

12. Celebration

Celebration might be understood as the act of performance—a public ritual, a sacrament, or a solemn ceremony with the appropriate rites. It is a performance of honor, differentiated by practices that exceed the normal or a routine set of norms. Celebration is the marking, recognition, of an important moment. Celebration is linked to observance, whereas observance is the practice of conforming one’s actions toward something such as a condition, the law, or a festivity. In this way, celebration is not a passive action or performance; it is active inspection, the act of taking note or notice; celebration is watching carefully, giving attention, noticing otherwise. Celebration might be understood as participatory such that one is coming to realize or know something through their consideration of a thing. Celebration is a project of adherence, a willingness to dwell with something for a time and being (un)made by that participation. While celebration is given to sociality and adds to the soundscape, Black celebration or acts of celebration initiated or ritualized by Black people, such as shouting, singing, praising, and praying, are contested matters in Western epistemological frames and, therefore, are rendered to be illegible, noise. That is, celebration in a Western epistemological frame cannot acknowledge or account for the fullness of Blackness, as it often derides the appearance, sound, and style of Black aesthetics in celebration. In the weather of anti-Blackness, for Black people, celebration is instructive, providing way-making tools which account for what one may encounter and what they are working through as they journey. Celebration is small; it is a way of tracking, “reading of

and response to those atmospheric pressures and the predictably unpredictable changes in climate” [62] (p. 107).

Reflecting on elements of celebration, Okello [64] wrote about the urgency of practicing—embodying and materializing—ideas like joy, care, and touch as, first, interior projects that can engender alternative planes of aliveness for Black people. There can be a tendency to treat celebration as extant only if occasioned by others or some other thing, as alluded to when Velma begins to look out the window and away from herself. Cultivating humanizing habits of the interior enhances the potential of living those habits publicly. Readers are reminded of this idea when Bambara [1] writes “the source of health is never outside. Sweetheart” (p. 220). Here, one learns that intimate knowing can be a conduit for, or open up pathways to, wholeness. Concomitantly, personal work for Bambara is never disconnected from communal healing; they are bound up together. In *The Salter Eaters*, Velma’s healing is in relation with a community of friends, colleagues, guardians, and healers that observe, which is to say celebrate, Velma’s passage into and through the anti-Black conditions. Velma is encamped by the community—they labor with her toward Velma’s “rising on steady legs” and bursting her cocoon [1] (p. 225). Expanding the notion of wholeness beyond the individual, the novel teaches that individuals are healed in a community and that communities can too be restored. Said differently, healing is not singular. Instead, healing extends to those in the immediate circle and the concentric relations they inhabit in the Claybourne ecosystem. Finally, the healing session itself should be understood as a matter of celebration. Whereas Black people have been conditioned to culturally specific approaches to social and political matters with shame and hesitancy, the novel compels readers to see otherwise—to celebrate the capacities of ancient wisdom and traditions, ways of knowing and being which refuse the singularity of rational, Western epistemologies.

13. Affective Encounters with the Social Political Moment

The following excerpts annotate the affective and embodied ways in which we are experiencing anti-equity warfare.

13.1. Wilson

The emails were brief, cunning, and seething with contempt. One after another they entered the text thread. Each one malicious, violent, murderous, and intending to commit harm. The signatory, emboldened by and beneath algorithmic structures, was unrestrained in their rage, and we, those in support of anti-racist faculty at the university, were the unprotected target. What are the words of instruction, of support, for those who, by openly supporting anti-racism, are caught in the vehement cross hairs of unrelenting systems of violence and voices of discontent that want us to disappear, to kill ourselves, to go back to Africa? What arrangement of sentences ought to intervene for and on behalf of those who are target and targeted, and, even when the punch, slap, spit, legislative gesture, or epithet misses the mark, it still lands in proximity to us, our families, communities. I am thinking about what it means to create in and amid conditions that mean for one’s destruction, to create when you are in harm’s way. I am thinking about what it means to exist as harm—the injury, the evil, the embodiment of immorality and iniquity. I am thinking about how to create amid danger. Harm’s way is Baton Rouge Police and Ieshia Evans. She was there to protest the excessive force. She is refusing the forceful harm perpetrated against Black people. She is a vessel—a container for holding, a person who embodies some quality such as care and regard. Evans is a vessel of regard, and she is in danger.

Dangerous—able or likely to cause harm or injury, likely to cause or to have adverse consequences. To be in danger is to be subject to consequences. Danger—hazardous, troubling, risky, and unhealthy. Danger is bad for your health. To dwell in and amid danger, before the proverbial harmful event or effect, is for the body, mind, and spirit to be wholly unhealthy. It is precarious and threatening to be in a place, to be in this place of insecurity, out in the open, where the air feels thin and the darkness all-encompassing,

and choose, over and over again, to live. In graduate school, a dear mentor asked me not just to collect lists and names, and quotes, and stories. She asked me to sit with and come to know them, to respond to them with my living. I was learning, then, how to be responsible for the things I read, and wrote, and spoke, and witnessed. My work, the work of a Black scholar as more than documentation—documentation, as history reminds us, is not liberation—was to align my doing with my reading in ways that might assist our world in thinking through and about liberation. I was to be held accountable for how words might conjure worlds, what words might accomplish as flesh for the material lives of those of us who now confront racialized violence and systemic oppression in their various forms. In dangerous times, in this moment, my responsibility is toward remembrance.

13.2. *Shawn*

Whenever there is a news item or social media post regarding anti-equity work across the country, I deal with an onslaught of thoughts and feelings. Initially, I was given pause but later vocalized why the premises of the legislative moves or public rhetoric against equity (misnamed as parental rights, protecting children, or anti-CRT) were flawed. In fact, the initial moves seemed to have been minuscule and unlikely to affect significant changes because society seemed to have recently (re)opened its eyes to the anti-Black systemic infrastructures and experiences of Black people. After all, the murder of George Floyd on the 25 May 2020, had taken place less than a year before, and US institutions (schools, colleges, and businesses alike) had begun to declare acknowledgments of anti-Blackness and espouse commitments to investments, policies, and practices that would seek to ameliorate the experiences of Black and other minoritized communities and eradicate oppressive operations. However, as time progressed, it became abundantly clear that the legislative moves were neither only localized nor limited.

Consequently, when the anti-equity mantra seemed to permeate political discourse (à la anti-diversity training at the federal level), campaign messages (touting parental rights), legislative maneuvers (seeking to ban books and constrain curriculum), and legal cases (against federally recognized reproductive rights, allowing states to regulate gun sales, upholding affirmative action, and civil liberties by allowing discrimination against LGBTQ+ families under the guise of religious liberty), it became explicitly clear(er) that this was all part of a larger agenda to undo the progress made to date, regress to perspectives and practices which would ensure reignited and sustained oppressions, while granting permission for vitriol and anti-freedoms to be normalized—with no recourse for justice for those most impacted.

To this end, since 2020, I have moved from feelings of pause and disappointment to feelings of being threatened and unsafe. I have moved from thoughts about the incredulity of anti-Black and anti-freedom bills being proposed in 2020–2023 to feelings of uncertainty and despondency after they have been finalized and signed into law. It moved from anger at the vitriol and massive funding and mobilized machinery to existential questions related to my well-being and professional work, including at my place of employment. These feelings have meandered in intensity but have persisted, even as the national anti-equity cause intensifies in various ways.

These feelings and impacts are, at once, personal and professional, for the self and the wider society, for the now and educational futures. Thus, for example, a state board's decision to strip admissions and hiring processes of explicit DEI content made me question whether a program I co-coordinate that focuses explicitly on equity may soon be cut. But it also made me question whether the nature of professional relations that follow may regress, since the idea of "fit", which has traditionally augured well for people who are white or who comport to normative white ways of being, would further get entrenched, at the exclusion of people of Color, particularly those committed to issues of equity and justice with color-evasion. Further, it thrust colleagues and me into a state of uncertainty about the direction of our work. For example, I was invited to co-lead a workshop that was explicitly about facilitating DEI conversations in the classroom. And, even to host that at a

time when the state and university were still figuring out the new terrain, I felt paralyzed and, although courageous, also recognized my junior faculty positioning and wanted to avoid any ensuing issues. The result was that we reframed the title of the session but persisted with the focus of the session. These tensions between the legal and institutional realities versus my commitment to equity and justice work remain. In fact, with the state's recent anti-tenure moves, the institution's recent removal of a beloved Dean, and the other sociocultural issues facing the state and the university, the tensions, tenuousness, and precarities have all but intensified, reinforcing paralysis, strategic persistence, and/or planful escapes.

14. Toward an Epistemology of Care, Touch, and Celebration

Tracing individual reflexive moments of encounter with the current political climate, in conversation with a close reading of Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* [1], while keeping at the center refusal as a theoretical frame, gave way to a set of ideas that might inform an epistemology of care, touch, and celebration.

15. Care

Insights from our duoethnography reveal that we discuss and operationalize care in multiple ways congruent with how we have theorized it here in a dialogue with Bambara [1] and the Black feminist lineage, specifically Camp's [5,49] framings of refusal. For the purposes of this paper, we will focus on three thematic instantiations of care: (1) care in our collaboration on this project; (2) care as desired [by us] and as evident in our affective data and as witnessed or experienced during the anti-equity furor. As we discussed earlier, care for us refers to a living tenderness, a way of looking, of being with, of tarrying, that is filled with regard, coupled with a deep knowing, a recognition of the ways in which it is harmful to be in the world, and care as the responsibility of accompaniment. It is this theorization of care that we substantiate, as evidenced in our study.

First, the data illustrate how care was evidenced in our collaboration. Specifically, this was evident in our vocalizing of our affective experiences and our processing of that experience as part of our qualitative inquiry. For instance, we did not merely engage with these data through the act of writing and visual reading separately. Instead, we engaged in a dialogic vocalizing process that epitomized the care about which we theorize. For example, just before we began our vocal engagement with the data, Shawn said

I think for the purposes of the data collection process, we could do the reading orally—so you could read yours, I could read mine, and then we can listen out for what cadences we hear. I think that would be good as a distinct format. We've written about it individually, we've read it aloud for each other, and then collectively we can unpack it.

This emblemized a living tenderness that would be attentive to the feelings conjured by vocal utterances that may get missed by mere visual reading. Further, after agreeing to this plan, Wilson asked Shawn whether he wanted to begin, and Shawn deferred to Wilson by explicitly acknowledging Wilson's seniority and first author positioning. However, Wilson was clear in communicating that "it's first only [00:01:30], for no reason in particular. I know you notice things, so let me let you know." That moment clearly communicated Wilson's engagement in a living tenderness that first spoke to his understanding of Shawn's personhood, meticulousness, and attentiveness to detail, that is, a deep knowing, as well as Wilson's commitment to care in the process regardless of authorial sequence or seeming professional seniority—a responsibility of accompaniment. These and several other examples in the transcript data as well as our lived experiences as colleagues, first in the same department and now in different institutions, underscore that this epistemology of care that we seek to theorize and contribute to is possible in education. Our processes have illustrated what it might mean, as care, to be laboring with.

Second, the data were clear in illuminating how we desire care. Specifically, across our orthographic and vocalized representations of our thoughts and feelings, our desire for

care was highlighted. This was evidenced in the discussions about the lack of protection for Black and other minoritized faculty who are engaged in equity work in an anti-equity environment. Despite institutional and other emails, social media, and mainstream media news, there were no related messages from institutions to communicate their care for us, our wholeness and well-being, even as our identities and work were/are under greater scrutiny and susceptible to more harm. Thus, we desired care in the form of protection, which seemed all but missing. This care reflects the need for regard, which is often precluded from the Black body, and this preclusion gets amplified when Black wholeness—body and mind—is also engaged in equity work. Relatedly, both of our separate written pieces conjured up the image, presence, and being of refusals of a Black person whose recent positioning in the public eye axiomatized the care we and they desire—whether it was Aisha Evans or George Floyd. For example, in the data, Aisha Evans was framed as a “vessel of regard”—that is, a vessel of care—while simultaneously being seen as a vessel of danger and, as such, faced disregard, rather than care. Similarly, the data framed George Floyd as a symbol of, for, and about care—a moment in time when white society attempted to acknowledge anti-Blackness and the need for care—but, since then, we have also seen how the statements and public pronouncements of care have resulted in the sustained or renewed retrenchment of anti-Blackness, using anti-equity policies which communicate a lack of care, a lack of regard.

Thus, consistent with Camp [5,49], our refusals serve to bring our desired care into being, so that we might be attentive to and present within our being and work. This and so many other examples of care, as desired and desirable care, are reflected throughout our inquiry and extend the work of the theorists we engage with, care about, and bring alive in this theorization of care. Specifically, this expansive conception of care was also woven throughout the data, as noted above, to communicate what we needed to hold onto and release—how we engage and enable wholeness through and with care.

16. Touch

Touch, as counseled by Black feminist theorization, can be located in the written reactions and authors’ dialogic exchange. Touch, as inextricably bound to the affective dimension, is an epistemological frame for understanding the self as one encounters the social world. Across their writings, authors discussed a felt sense of precarity that shaped their living and work. Precarity can be understood as feelings of uncertainty, notions of unsafety, and the longing for security. Here, to live in and with the instability, the threat of unsafety, and no security is a proximate lived experience; as Black faculty, there seemed to be a sense that one was always and already open to antagonisms and within reach of the harmful effects of anti-Black policies and practices, as evidenced by Shawn: “These feelings have meandered in intensity, but have persisted, even as the national anti-equity cause intensifies. . . . These feelings and impacts are at once personal and professional, for the self and the wider society, for the now and educational futures.” However, even as the antagonisms touch them, they touch each other in ways that might sustain and call forth mechanisms for living.

As one point of touch, Wilson discussed notions of remembrance as attuning to the history of Black living praxis as a site for meaning-making, plotting, and planning. In particular, Wilson called attention to the lessons a mentor shared about encountering, engaging, and working with Black texts and ideas. This anecdote illustrates the work of relationality as critical to life-sustaining praxis. More specifically, attending to the sacred nature of literature was an opportunity to draw on the long genealogies of Black thought and survival praxis, lifting temporality, the momentum of memory, as one of the ways minoritized folks might negotiate their conditions and consider the future. The momentum of memory bespeaks the principle of looking back in order to press forward or Sankofa; it is the assumption that there is something important to be gleaned by seeing the present condition of resistance through and as situated in a long emancipation that refuses

notions of resolution. As we align our “doing with [our] reading” we are *in touch* with the momentum of memory.

Whereas touch is also indicative of holding closely, there was a sense in the excerpts that Black and minoritized faculty are responsible for archiving the moment in preparation for what is ahead. That is, the responsibility is not only to affirm the sacredness of living achieved in and under threat; it is to document, archive, and be present with one another in living, annotated by Shawn as “strategic persistence, and/or planful escapes.” The project of liveliness and living is to tell and share complex renderings of the self and selves as they live, make, and respond to the press of culture. There seems to be recognition here that, at least, some of this labor will occur in excess of the formal institution, conceding to not being dependent on racialized organizations to perform and be something they cannot be. If then, institutions cannot account for the textures and the needs of Black and minoritized faculty toward wholeness, touching, as the will to hold and cultivate other spirits across space and time is to lessen reliance on racialized organizations as life-affirming institutions and toward collectives of holding, being held, and relationality—touch.

17. Celebration

Although a distinct part of the tripartite we discuss in this paper, celebration is simultaneously also a coagulation and culmination of the epistemology of care, touch, and celebration we advance. We offer two examples from our data that illuminate how celebration might be evidenced. Note that these two examples do not constitute the limits of celebration; instead, they represent some of its possibilities. We draw attention to celebration as a continuous and dynamic way of being. First, we highlight some of what our data communicated about celebration as a continuous and dynamic way of being through an active celebration of ancestors. Next, we highlight some of what the data revealed about the celebration of the living through the living.

The data underscored that our life and work as Black scholars must honor and lift up, that is, celebrate, the life and work of Black ancestors and scholars who preceded us and upon whose work we build, extend, or connect with in one way or another. For example, our vocalizing unearthed the following profundity:

In graduate school, a dear mentor asked me not to just reflect or not to just collect lists and names, quotes, and stories. She asked me to sit with and come to know them, to respond to them with my living. I was learning then how to be responsible for the things I read and wrote and spoke, and witnessed. My work, the work of a Black scholar as more than documentation. Documentation, as history reminds us, is not liberation. . . I was to be held accountable for how words might conjure worlds.

We have, therefore, come to understand that part of the celebration is in the knowing and the living. That, as Black scholars, we cannot simply just cite, as in #citeBlackwomen, for example; we must perform so as well as honor those whose work preceded us by living the quality of life they theorized about, sustaining the impact that they have indelibly left on us, and achieve so intentionally in our living.

Secondly, and relatedly, the data also centralized that part of the celebration is about space making for us and others—that is, a celebration of life among the living. For example, as the data revealed, we need to be committed to “providing a general space to gather and to be, the clearing, if you will, where folks have an opportunity to go and to dance. And so, I hear, there was a particular dance happening as I’m thinking about the words and the movement and the silent listening. But it [00:24:30] wasn’t silent listening. It was this own sort of type of affective attunement.”

Together, both pieces of evidence from our inquiry revealed that celebration is necessary—always—of the dead and the living through our living. In these and other ways, celebration reflects not just active inspection, taking note or notice, watching carefully, giving attention, or noticing otherwise. It is participatory and a project of adherence, a willingness to dwell with a being for a time and to being (un)made by that participation.

It is the sociality, relationality, and infinite connectivity between the past, present, and future—the dead and the living. And it is reflected in the shouts, the shakes, the moves, and the music, the dance, and the deliberate honoring of Black beingness. It is the living of the literature and the literaturizing of the living. Asé.

18. Discussion

Following refusal is the work of imagining possibility in the face of negation. Honest and critical momentum toward an epistemology of care, touch, and celebration that invites full breath is to acknowledge how and in what ways one has been holding their breath or unable to breathe. On this crucial point of acknowledgment, we turn to Bambara [1], who wrote the following:

So used to being unwhole and unwell, one forgot what it was to walk upright and see clearly, breathe easily, think better than was taught, be better than one was programmed to believe . . . For people sometimes believed that it was safer to live with complaints, was necessary to cooperate with grief, was all right to become an accomplice in self-ambush. (pp. 107–108)

Acknowledging one's complicity should be read as a responsibility to the self, to see and understand what wholeness requires, and to work from the root toward alternative possibilities of being. From there, the analysis reveals additional reflexive considerations that culminate in the following considerations: honoring humanity—moving away from paternalistic notions of care and toward understandings of accompaniment; governance—confronting power dynamics and moving toward power redistribution; and structure—committing to practices that foster relationality, mutual aid, and healing.

19. Honoring Humanity

Anti-Blackness, as discussed in the data, is hazardous to Black health—psychologically, socially, emotionally, and materially—whereas, to be Black is to be woven into the sociopolitical fabric in the Western United States as that which is of no value, no recognition, and dislodged from assumptions of humanity. Taking up an epistemology of care, touch, and celebration refuses instantiations of humanity that disregard or underemphasize the long history of Black people concerning anti-Black organizational structures, both formal and extrajudicial. Care, touch, and celebration name the weathering effects of racialized policies and practices and how they come to bear on the lives of Black people and communities, indicative of persistent, deleterious, slow erosion of Black liveliness and living. In the fictional space of Claybourne [1] or in the precarity which entraps Black scholars, hostile environments accumulate, shortening the lives of Black people.

Confronting this toxicity is to look critically at research and data on and about systemic racism; it means configuring models of care, touch, and celebration unbounded to an organization, such as funding unlimited counseling for Black people to providers of their choosing. An epistemic shift is an acknowledgment that Black life is under threat within racialized organizations, and investing or allocating resources that work toward Black liveliness is ethical and essential for their well-being. This acknowledgment is more than a statement; it is guided by questions engendered by Black specificity, such as how are we centering Black life? How are we affirming Black ideas and ways of knowing?

20. Governance

Honoring humanity can assist in making epistemological departure necessary in inviting new ways of being beyond the normative order of knowledge and being directed by Black voice. Moreover, to work against weathering is to consider what individuals and organizations one might divest from, so that, as meaningful investments occur, they do not accomplish so against an unchanging system and set of priorities, thereby attending to governance. Institutions, established and maintained on histories of colonial violence and anti-Black disregard, are not engineered to be responsive to the voices of workers, particularly those who are Black. Like corporations, education institutions do not always

act in the interest of workers and, in many cases, act as a deliberate affront. Reflecting this sentiment, organized labor exponentially amassed between 2020 and 2023, where graduate students and non-tenure stream faculty, specifically, organized unions and deployed a labor strike in response to unmet calls for their basic needs.

The governance theme is premised on Black futurity, which calls forth alternative forms of being and caring for one another beyond state control, force, and surveillance. There is an emphasis in this mode on integrating relational forms of decision making as organizations work to empower workers and students, asking questions like how an institution might sustain labor protections and disavow neglect. Concerns about governance must extend to resources, involving members beyond the university and surrounding communities. How much say, for example, do community members have in budgetary decisions and spending? How does our budget reflect values of care, touch, and celebration?

21. Structure

If governance attends to power redistribution, the structure would be concerned with growing healthy environments. The recognition here is that Black people are routinely asked to negotiate hostile environments, and, in doing so, their health, broadly understood, is ignored, or given a secondary value. Structures of care, touch, and celebration, thus, intervene on anti-Black attitudes, actions, and behaviors and invite models of safety, trust, and respect. In order to foster these imperatives, those in positions of power must ask themselves how they might cultivate practices of deep sharing, vulnerability, and connectivity. Aligning with individuals as a way of being differs from collaborating to accomplish a particular task. Collaboration values endpoints, outcomes, and product generation that, at its best, might support a holistic goal and, at worst, are convenience matters. The presumption that follows collaboration is that the connection or work together is temporary, involving a concentrated time where energies toward specific goals might meet.

Connectivity, however, values depth and being with one another; it is a restructuring that reconsiders how we see each other and ourselves; it is a posture of mutuality that exceeds outcomes and, instead, is committed to being in process with one another. Structuring an epistemology of care, touch, and celebration is a commitment. This work of structure is an applied practice that moves beyond matters of obligation to questions like how care, touch, and celebration show up in one's work and life.

22. Significance

For many Black people, breathing—living—is grappling with compounding oppressions and antagonisms that can take seed as internal erosions that affect their time, energy, and movements in the world. We center Black lenses in our offering of an epistemology of wholeness with care, touch, and celebration. We know that the impact of attacks on schooling and education processes at large are not confined to Black people and communities. Whereas the current socio-political climate is applying veritable threats on critical scholars and cultural workers, exacted as legislative bills, public critique, and back-lash to critical scholarship, for example, we understand these pressures in the protracted struggle to confront and unseat whiteness as an epistemic project in the United States and globally. Therefore, we suggest that care, touch, and celebration in education are critical for other communities but especially for those communities that have become the butt of anti-equity maneuvers. This manuscript invites discussion on how educators and scholars might take the conditions of wholeness seriously, informed by critical lessons from the more extended genealogy of Black survival praxis. In a conversation with that genealogy, Black living, and healing practices, an analysis of Black literature and duoethnographic reflexivity gave way to an epistemology of care, touch, and celebration that breaks with the epistemic tradition of Western knowledge and evidences other possibilities of working against anti-Black antagonisms.

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