

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: REIMAGINING BLACK WOMEN'S
EPISTEMOLOGIES: THE KNOWING AND DOING OF
ALIVENESS

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Producing scholarship within the academy often requires Black women scholars to conform to epistemic standards and research methods that are far removed from the ways of knowing we know to be true (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2006; Saunders, 2008). This dissonance can be deeply damaging, as Black women are often expected to abandon their epistemologies and standpoints in favor of dominant knowledge systems legitimized within the academy (Dillard, 2006; Saunders, 2008). Consequently, the everyday knowledge and experiences of Black women intellectuals beyond the academy remain marginalized and undertheorized in educational research (Dillard, 2006).

In this critical ethnographic study (Madison, 2005), I challenge the marginalization of Black women's epistemologies in educational research by examining how Black women in my extended kinship network create and share knowledge intergenerationally through everyday cultural practices, including food-making and storytelling. I illuminate everyday contexts where food, family, and knowledge converge to better understand how these domains shape knowledge production and transmission across generations of Black women in my family. Guided by Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 1990) and Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021), this study centers on the everyday knowledge practices of Black women that are often overlooked in educational research.

The findings highlight three key patterns in the production and transmission of knowledge. First, the women in my family primarily share tacit and embodied forms of knowledge through food and food-making practices. Second, this knowledge circulates within an adaptive intergenerational network shaped by lived experiences and broader sociohistorical contexts. Third, knowledge adapts and evolves as family members respond to changing structural and material conditions, leading to moments of epistemic rupture. Together, these findings demonstrate that food and food-making function as epistemic sites where Black women actively construct, preserve, and transform knowledge, while also sustaining aliveness (Quashie, 2021) across generations.

By positioning food as a conduit for knowledge and food-making as a process through which aliveness is sustained (Quashie, 2021), this study contributes to scholarship that recognizes the epistemological and methodological significance of understanding everyday cultural practices within Black families. I offer this study as both a meditation on the brilliance of Black women and an example of interdisciplinary educational research that centers Black life and being rather than solely on Black suffering.

REIMAGINING BLACK WOMEN’S EPISTEMOLOGIES: THE KNOWING AND DOING
OF ALIVENESS

by

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Foreword

Follow the drinking gourd, follow the drinking gourd, for the old man is awaiting to carry you to freedom. Follow the drinking gourd. I first learned this song in music class, in the first or second grade. Although it was my first time learning the words to the song, the words felt very familiar to me. It felt like a song that my spirit already knew. I was always told I was *gifted*, so I wrote it off as one of those things I would come to understand later, as I *kept on living*.

Follow the drinking gourd. When I watched the stars with my father and sister as a little girl, as we often would, I remember looking for the drinking gourd that would point me to the North Star. Comfort would fill my tiny body every time I achieved my goal. This feeling of comfort reminded me that, without fail, even on the cloudiest nights, the drinking gourd was there, brilliant and luminous, offering me the same guidance, protection, and wisdom it provided my people for generations.

As an adult, I still look for the drinking gourd every night—a ritual that reminds me that there is always a path to freedom, even on the darkest nights. A path that has already been cleared by those who came before me. By those who sowed seeds of wisdom in their songs, stories, and recipes, to guide me along the way. It is through this ancestral wisdom and familial knowledge that I have grown to learn and live theory—that I have found my “*North Star*” (Love, 2019, p. 132). So, I give thanks to my first teachers of theory—to those who taught me how to follow the drinking gourd.

Marie. Thelma. Phyllis. Hattie. Leslie. Nany Pearl. Isabella. Mattie. Mary Lou. Margie Rea. Emma. Rose. Oreal Pearl. Women of the water. Storytellers. Rememberers. Theorists. Your hands and hearts have fed me more times than the hairs on my head. Your kitchens, living

rooms, porches, patios, and yards have sustained me. Your churches, Sunday school lessons, and Vacation Bible School classrooms have created in me a peace that can never be taken away.

You have gifted me with your dreams, stories, and even your pain. It is because of you that I know who I am and *whose* I am—that I come from *good stock*. You were my first teachers and my first examples of the beauty and brilliance of Black women. Your knowledge, prayers, and sacrifices guide me and go before me. You have prepared a space for me in rooms that I never thought I could, or even would, enter.

So, I give thanks to the Creator for seeing fit for me to travel through a lineage of wayfinders and waymakers. With one foot in the ivory tower and the other on the grounds you have prepared for me, I write this study in your dedication and honor. Your wisdom and knowledge have rooted me before I could even pronounce the words *epistemology* or *ontology*. You are my literature. There is no theory, no method, and no North Star that shines brighter than you and the stories you have bestowed upon me.

Descartes (1637) taught me, *I think, therefore I am*. Ferrier (1854) taught me that *ignorance is the failure to know what can be known*. And yet, neither taught me to add milk to my scrambled eggs to yield a larger serving so that everyone has enough to eat. Nor did they teach me to make spaghetti with ground turkey instead of ground beef because it is leaner and usually on sale. This is the knowledge that matters to me, to us. This is the knowledge that keeps us alive, when everything in this damned country is so hell-bent on our mental, physical, and spiritual destruction. So, I center you, I center us, and all the wisdom and knowledge that flows through us.

Although your food and recipes were my introduction to this study and the vehicle for our family narratives, your knowledge is my drinking gourd. It is through our cultivated and

shared foods and recipes that I came to know your stories and the knowledge that you so graciously offered me. While I snuck into the kitchen to taste the food before it was ready to be served, or touched the many magnets on your fridge, I was watching and learning.

With every word that I write, it all comes back to me. Eavesdropping on *grown folk*' business while snapping fresh green beans from the garden or shucking silky corn husks. Burning myself on hot crock pots and cast-iron skillets, despite your *many* warnings to be careful and pay attention. Seeing your smiles when I got a recipe just right. I know now that this was my vetting process to prepare me to tell this story—to tell our story.

Engaging our collective memories and senses, I ground our family narratives in the knowledge-making practices that have sustained us through hell and high water. Like your stories and recipes, remembered and rarely written down, this knowledge can never truly be lost. You taught me to use my dreams, memories, and senses, and that is what brings me to this work. So, I thank you again for your knowledge and wisdom.

Even as we adapt and change out of necessity and survival, our familial knowledge has been a constant source of healing and hope for the future. It transcends time and space, through multiple generations, without validation or explanation. It is what has allowed us to make a way out of no way. And even when this knowledge seems to be no longer valued by the outside world, it continues to matter to us, and therefore, it matters to me. Like the North Star, our knowledge continues to light the way and point us to freedom. We will continue to live and thrive because it is what we have always done, even on the darkest nights.

Dedication

This study is dedicated to the Cary, Conley, Davis, Long, Marshall, Mouzon, and Paige women who showed me my way North. I am the fruit of your labor. This project is a testament of your love, strength, and fortitude.

“My great-grandmama told my grandma the part she lived through that my grandma didn't live through and my grandma told my mama what they both didn't live through and my mama told me.”

—*Gayl Jones*

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There are no words to adequately express my deepest and most sincere gratitude and appreciation for the guidance, support, and prayers that have brought me to this momentous occasions. I am forever indebted to my village of faculty, friends, family, and loved ones who helped me make cross the finish line.

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To my best friends Dallas and Lori, it's now been over a decade of us seeing each other at our best and worst and choosing to love each other anyway. Thank you for everything you have done for me and the City of Townsville. I love you more than Bella loves Edward, and more than Luna loves miscellaneous boxes.

To my sisters and guardian angels, Gabrielle and Tiffany, thank you for loving me before I knew how to love myself. Thank you for always being by my side, even though you're both more anxious than me. Thank you for always giving me a place to stay and for always picking up the phone.

To Zazie, thank you for being my heart in human form. I hope you see the line of women you come from and are inspired to follow your dreams. You are a force to be reckoned with and so you never forget it, here is a permanent reminder of your contribution to my dissertation (i.e., you deleting an entire chapter to type on my computer): ,LKDCK IIOOK0-OPLX
Dfbfgbxfgbfgbfb vfbbgbbfthrtgrthtgrdsgfgdfgfg'

To my father, I get my strength and courage from you. Thank you for teaching me to be of good courage. Thank you for teaching me to keep my head on a swivel, and to not take any wooden nickels. At times, the lessons you've taught me were learned the hard way. But the love you have for me has taught me that I can conquer anything. Thank you for the book reports, thank you for the Black history lessons, thank you for teaching us who we are and where we come from. That we come from good stock. I am a Conley through and through...and now we get to put Dr. in front of it.

To my mother, I will never be able to repay you for all of your sacrifices and for all you have done for me. Everything that I am is because of you. So, I dedicate this moment to you. For the nights you stayed up with me. For the times you wiped my tears. For the times you saved the

day. Not only did you teach me how to fight, but you taught me how to fight to win. You taught me how to have faith. So, this is for you, this is for us, and this is for your new Lexus.

Table of Contents

Dedication	v
Acknowledgements	vi
List of Figures	x
Introduction	1
Statement of Problem.....	2
Background	5
Gaps in Literature	6
Research Significance	8
Research Objectives	13
Structure of Dissertation	13
Literature Review.....	15
Context.....	16
Food as a Form of Knowledge.....	17
Food Education	18
Interdisciplinary Insights on Food	20
Storytelling as a Form of Knowledge	26
Family Storytelling	27
Storytelling as a Form of Healing.....	29
Gaps in Literature	30
Theoretical Framework	34
A Meditation on Methods... ..	65
Methods and Methodology	67
Prologue	99
Overview of Findings	100
Narrative Vignettes	103
Arc I: Contextualizing Black Women’s Knowledge	111
Arc II: Knowledge Transfer Across Generations	128
Epistemic Rupture is Inevitable. Epistemic Loss is Not.....	145
Summary of Findings.....	192
Discussion	193
Analysis of Findings	198
Implications.....	206
Limitations	217
Appendix A	222
References.....	223

List of Figures

Figure 1	56
Figure 2	57
Figure 3	131

Introduction

“A people do not throw their geniuses away.
 And if they are thrown away,
 it is our duty as artists, scholars,
 and witnesses for the future
 to collect them again
 for the sake of our children, ...
 if necessary, bone by bone”
 (Walker, 1983, p. 92)

I enter this work with the Black women from whom I descend. I am the fruit of their labor and living evidence of their unwavering care, sacrifice, and support. I am the great-granddaughter of Marie, who was the *mama* of Thelma, and the grandmother of Queenie. Queenie is the mother of Tina, and Tina is the mother of me. The knowledge highlighted in this study did not originate in an archive, a laboratory, or even a classroom. Rather, it began in the hands, kitchens, and stories of the women in my family.

As the women have come before me, I am both a storyteller and a rememberer. In my family, recipes are rarely written down. Instead, they are memorized and passed orally between women who rely on their senses and memories to recall and recreate dishes often attached to family stories and oral histories. As recipes evoke recollections of mothers and grandmothers, memories of family traditions, and reflections on how food was procured, prepared, and preserved, they become vessels of intergenerational knowledge within our extended kin network.

Food and food-making operate as sites of knowledge production, where Black women construct, remember, and transmit ways of knowing across generations. Their food stories are entangled with the particularities of Black life and with racialized histories that extend across generations shaped by the enduring legacy of enslavement. Yet these stories are not solely about survival or suffering. They are also about everyday acts of care and innovation that sustain Black life and being.

Through the sharing of recipes and food stories, the women in my kinship structure demonstrate how they have sustained their aliveness for over four generations, creating and transmitting knowledge through food. As Quashie (2021) reminds us, Black aliveness refers to the interior and expansive dimensions of Black life that exist beyond narratives of suffering. Within my family's kitchens and conversations about food, cooking becomes more than the ordinary preparation of food. It becomes a site where memory is preserved, relationships are nurtured, and knowledge is created and shared across generations of Black women.

Yet despite the richness of these everyday practices, the intellectual labor embedded in Black women's foodwork (Williams-Forson, 2006) and the knowledge produced within these intimate spaces remain undertheorized in educational research. This study emerges from the tension between the seemingly ordinary lived experiences of Black women and the forms of knowledge the academy deems credible and worthy of study. By examining the food and food-making practices of Black women in my extended kinship network, this study positions Black women's foodways as epistemological sites through which knowledge is produced and shared across generations.

Statement of Problem

Producing work in the academy often requires Black academics to adhere to research methods that are "drafted into the service of a larger destructive force" (Saunders, 2008, p. 67). As our knowledge is grounded in the ongoing and ontological ruptures of living in the wake of enslavement, it is no surprise that our unique and "blackened" (p. 13) knowledge is often regarded as unscientific and illegitimate (Sharpe, 2016). To make our work more legible to the academy, we are often forced to engage with dominant methods and knowledge systems, even if they are counter to what we know and feel to be true (Sharpe, 2016). Conditioned and disciplined

by the academy to subscribe to binary and rigid ways of thinking, we are often taught to produce research and scholarship that “reinscribe our own annihilation” (p. 13) and leaves us vulnerable to epistemic violence (Sharpe, 2016).

I employ Sharpe’s (2016) conceptualization of wake work as a means of “inhabiting and rupturing” (p. 18) this epistemological stance in the known and unimaginable lives of Black women. I am mainly interested in how we might see and imagine worlds outside of the ongoing terror we face under occupation and the constant threat of Black death (Patterson, 1982). Wake work makes it possible to attend to the everyday sites where Black life is sustained, including domestic and kinship spaces where knowledge is produced through practices such as cooking and storytelling. I engage in wake work to collect and map the “archives of the everyday of Black immanent and imminent death...tracking the ways we resist, rupture, and disrupt that immanence and imminence aesthetically and materially” (Sharpe, 2016, p. 13). Attending to these “archives of the everyday” (p. 13) requires looking beyond traditional institutional sites of knowledge production and toward the intimate spaces where Black life is sustained. In my family, these spaces include kitchens, dining room tables, and gardens where food-making practices, stories, memories, and knowledge circulate across generations of Black women.

Through social and political action, Black women have been vital to the development of Black knowledge production (Collins, 1990; Gordon, 1990). And yet, the contributions and intellectual traditions of Black women’s knowledge-making practices remain undertheorized in educational research beyond contributions to literary canon (Dillard, 2006). This subjugation of knowledge positions Black women and their knowledge systems as “outsider-within positions” (p. 12) in academic discourse, where they experience multi-marginality via race and gender, as both Black and woman (Collins, 1990).

As the dominant, overarching theory of knowledge, epistemology sets the standards that assess what knowledge is and why we can believe what we know to be true (Harding, 1987). Traditional approaches to epistemology remind us that this process is not apolitical but rooted in power relations that shape who and what is believed and why (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2006). In the U.S., the institutions that legitimate knowledge are rooted in white, Eurocentric epistemologies, often supported by positivist paradigms and knowledge-validation processes. Knowledge claims are commonly evaluated by a group of “experts” (p. 253) who maintain credibility as defined by dominant, hegemonic beliefs maintained by the very institutions that champion white epistemologies (Collins, 1990).

When Black women scholars assert their knowledge, beliefs, and ways of knowing, they are often suppressed by the academy’s prevailing knowledge-validation processes and methods. Alternatively, when Black women are recognized as legitimate knowledge makers in the academy, they can be rewarded for reinforcing dominant ideologies and white epistemic beliefs (Collins, 1990). Sharpe (2016), therefore, suggests modes and methods of research and teaching that undo the “racial calculus and...political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago” (p. 6).

Black women’s knowledge-making practices offer a vantage point that asserts Black women as bearers of knowledge worthy of knowing. Additionally, Black women’s knowledge-making practices offer methodological implications for how educational research can be informed by the cultural knowledge and practices of the Black communities and families it engages (Gordon, 1990). From this perspective, when we uplift the epistemologies of Black women, we reposition Black women as experts and knowledge-makers in their own unique contexts.

Background

Gordon (1990) calls for educational research that challenges dominant “regimes of truth” (p. 103), which shape educational theory and practice, as well as the creation, production, and dissemination of knowledge. And yet, the epistemological roots of white supremacy remain dominant throughout the academy and the U.S. education system (Bauman & Briggs, 2003; Conquergood, 2002; Fricker, 2007; Mills, 1997). Pervasive anti-blackness (Dumas, 2016) further informs the epistemic violence that shapes and legitimizes the power and privilege of knowing and knowledge production (Coles, 2016; Dumas & ross, 2016; Ferguson, 2000; Jennings & Lynn, 2005). Despite Black people creating cultural knowledge that spans multiple disciplines, the theoretical constructs and paradigms of Black epistemologies remain undertheorized in education research (Gordon, 1990).

I employ Gordon’s (1990) definition of African educational theory to ground my understanding of Black epistemologies:

African educational theory goes hand in hand with African-American epistemology: the study or theory of the knowledge generated out of the African-American existential condition, that is, of the knowledge and cultural artifacts produced by African-Americans based on African-American cultural, social, economic, historical, and political experience (p. 90).

I elect to use the term Black epistemologies rather than African American epistemology to take up a positioning and understanding of Blackness as a unique social relationality and structural position rather than racial identity alone (Hartman, 2022). Further, epistemology has been pluralized to include theories and frameworks related to Black epistemologies and intellectual

thought outside of the field of education, such as Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 1990) and endarkened feminist epistemology (Dillard, 2006).

I define Black epistemologies as endogenous, holistic, and nonsynchronous forms of knowledge shaped by the racialized and gendered experiences of Black folks (Dillard, 2006; Gordon, 1990; Collins, 1990). Drawing on the work of Gordon (1990), I emphasize the holistic nature of Black epistemologies. Gordon (1990) contends:

it is holistic because it is produced by scholars from a variety of fields and media, often not specifically in education or even academia. It is nonsynchronous because it has neither the same economic and political consciousness, nor “similar needs within it at the same point in time” (McCarthy, 1988, p. 185) as the dominant culture (p. 91).

Created within a social, political, historical, and cultural context, Black epistemologies are shaped by racialized particularities and embodied knowledges that have helped Black folks survive enslavement and its immediate wake. As such, Black epistemologies offer a theory of knowledge rooted in Black intellectual insurgency.

Gaps in Literature

“For many teachers, researchers and leaders, an often unspoken but present desire in our academic lives is to live with the deepest intimacy, a desire to live close to and with reverence for the life that is within and around us. However, given the weight of history and the meaning that both spirituality and Black womanhood have within spheres of academic life, speaking the truth of their impact and their grace too often renders women of color afraid of the risks involved in embracing spirituality in our academic lives—and sometimes, even more afraid not to”
(Dillard, 2006, p. ix)

Literature on particular and racialized knowledges in education largely engages Families and Communities of Color through frameworks such as funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). While both frameworks have advanced the conversation on subjugated knowledges in the field of education, the frameworks cannot provide an analysis deep enough to capture the experiences of Black women and girls. Contextualized by the intersections of race and gender, the lived experiences of Black women and the knowledge created out of these experiences can only be truly understood by other Black women (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2006; Muhammad & Haddix, 2016).

Although the experiences of Black womanhood are fluid and manifold, Muhammad and Haddix (2016) argue, “only Black women can truly know what it means to be Black women; talking with and for each other” (p. 304). Through care and community engagement, Black women construct meaning and knowledge from their experiences (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). For this reason, Black women deserve frameworks that speak to their unique experiences and affirm their humanity.

Within the discipline of education, the extent of literature relevant to Black women’s epistemologies and knowledge-making practices remains scant (Dillard, 2006). In the training and academic preparation of Black women as educational researchers and teachers, it is seldom that we are allowed to critically turn our gaze inward and pursue projects that affirm the intellectual and spiritual interests of Black womenfolk (Dillard, 2006). Dillard (2006) calls for “alternative ways of being academic” (p. xi) that encourage Black women to incorporate skills, knowledges, and cultural understandings that make space for teaching, learning, and research that is healing and humanizing.

In recent years, scholars in language and literacy education have made notable strides to amplify the voices and experiences of Black women and girls (Butler, 2018; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Muhammad & Haddix, 2016; Wing & Bell, 1997). Although existing literature situates Black women and girls' language and literacy practices within a unique standpoint of both gendered and racialized experiences, there is little focus on the unique epistemological knowledge and beliefs that Black women engage. Literature on Black girl language and literacy also largely focuses on spaces and places within traditional schooling. However, the development of epistemological knowledge and beliefs is also happening outside of school walls and universities, and in community other Black women (Collins, 2000).

Following the guidance of Dillard (2006), this study aims to bridge a gap in the literature by affirming Black women and legitimizing their knowledge-making practices that are often rendered invisible or insignificant in educational research. I aim to fill this gap by engaging storytelling and foodways as cultural artifacts that serve as evidence of Black epistemic knowledge. In the case of the Black women in my family, it is through food and family stories that knowledge is created and shared, to heal, nourish, and sustain our community. I further argue that knowledge creation expands beyond the walls of U.S. educational institutions and is rooted in our everyday life through food, recipes, and family stories.

Research Significance

Creating and sharing stories about individual and collective experiences influence identity development and the construction of social realities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Sian (2019) argues that storytelling provides racially marginalized groups with “a critical space to write our own narratives, open up new questions, and unsettle essentializing discourses” (p. 15). In this sense, storytelling can be a valuable educational and political tool to challenge and

resist dominant narratives used to further subjugate and marginalize Black and non-Black People of Color.

Stories can be used to create a collective identity and provide cultural resources necessary for the construction of knowledge (Irvine, 2004; Polletta, 2006; Tilly, 2002; Wilkins, 2012). Further, stories offer a means of “giving voice” (p. 175) to racially marginalized groups (Wilkins, 2012). From a womanist perspective, “Black womanhood is a starting point at which all societal problems can be addressed” (Phillips, 2006, p. xx). Therefore, the study of Black women, their epistemologies, and the stories that shape them is valuable and necessary to the discipline of education.

As stated otherwise by the Combahee River Collective (1977), “If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all systems of oppression” (p. 274). By situating Black women as experts in their knowledge-making processes situated within unique contexts, we challenge the traditional understandings of knowledge legitimized by the regimes of truth in the field of education (Dillard, 2006). My study is significant to the field of education because our everyday lived experiences shape and inform theory, impacting who we are and how we show up as educators, learners, and researchers (Chavez, 2012; Sealey-Ruiz; 2022). To break free from the dominant paradigms of the academy, we must disrupt forms of knowledge that prioritize objectivity and detachment from the identities that shape who we are and what we know (Chavez, 2012). Chavez (2012) asserts that stories of racially marginalized communities are both in the margins, yet woven into the experiences of our communities, alongside the teachings of the academy.

Reflecting on my own position in the margins, it is my family and our time around the kitchen table spent sharing food and stories that shape how I see myself as a person and as a

researcher. The academy often encourages scholars to detach their identities from their research in the name of objectivity (Dillard, 2006). Yet I refuse this separation. The knowledge created at my mother's kitchen table is not separate from my inquiry as a scholar, in fact, it is the foundation of it. The stories and recipes shared among the women in my family are not simply memories of domestic or cultural life, they are forms of knowledge that have sustained our community and our sense of aliveness (Quashie, 2021).

Contextualizing the margins and the stories told within them is an important process to engage in for critical race thinkers and scholars (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Elenes, 2001). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) contend, "without the authentic voices of people of color (as teachers, parents, administrators, students, and community members) it is doubtful that we can say or know anything useful about education in their communities" (p. 58). It is through this process that we might develop research that connects our lived experiences and consciousness to the knowledge-making practices that have sustained and nourished us, even in the face of great suffering (Collins, 1990).

Sealey-Ruiz (2013) affirms that due to the hostile environment of schools, Black women often explore their identities and consciousness in community with other Black women. This process largely includes biological, immediate, and extended family members and kinship ties (Marrun et al., 2021). From a womanist perspective, these networks make space for Black women to "acquire their identity, develop support systems, initiative, mutual support, and mutual respect" (Collins, 1990, p. 3). Based on this understanding, I highlight Black women in my family who mothered and protected me from the wrath of an anti-black, anti-women world, predicated on our destruction and death. Engaging the perspectives of Black Feminist Thought, I stand on the assertion that:

the daily living of Black women in a society that is racist, and sexist has produced a collective consciousness that resists being defined as less than, resists being stereotyped as undesirable, and seeks to define and empower its members by interpreting existing as a triumph (Johnson-Bailey, 2000, p. 98).

Through collective and specialized knowledge, Black women foster their empowerment, leading to self-reflection and self-actualization (Collins, 1989; Collins 1990). It is therefore worth engaging Black women's experiences to understand how we perceive the world through our stories and knowledge-making practices. Research that focuses on the family stories of Black women and girls' highlights community knowledge and cultural assets necessary for disrupting dominant narratives and ideologies (Marrun et al., 2021; Yosso, 2005).

By engaging in the knowledge creation practices of Black women, we gain valuable insight into the ways that our unique forms of knowledge can be used to resist and refuse oppression. At the most basic level, food and education are matters of life and death. They are matters of aliveness (Quashie, 2021). This study, therefore, challenges traditional forms of knowledge privileged in educational research, specifically in theory and practice, to make space for knowledge-making practices necessary for sustaining Black life.

As such, my work highlights the benefits and possibilities of interdisciplinary approaches to education and educational research that center on the alternative knowledges of Black women. Further, it highlights how food carries stories, which hold knowledge that is used to sustain and maintain Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021). From this focal point, I offer an analysis on food and storytelling as a maintenance for Monday morning, shaped by the knowledge-making practices of Black women.

Pushing scholars beyond the theory that *you are what you eat*, Williams-Forson (2013) challenges us to consider what we can learn about Black life and culture when we examine the intersections of food, gender, race, and class. This requires engaging in ideological warfare that not only critiques but also resists centuries-old stereotypes of Black folks related to food, race, and identity (Williams-Forson, 2013). Given the historical, social, political, and economic contexts in which dominant narratives and stereotypes are created, it is important to understand and recognize how dominant narratives and stereotypes are also embedded in food (Williams-Forson, 2013). Williams-Forson (2013) argues that this process requires a process of “self-definition” (Collins, 1986, p. 516) that supports Black folks in “identifying utilizing, and more importantly, redefining symbols” (p. 108) to dictate what truly represents our expressive culture and identity.

One way that this can be achieved is by engaging food and cooking as a form of storytelling. In an analysis of Works Progress Administration (WPA) Slave Narratives, Armstrong (2020) argues that food stories contribute to our understanding of food and food preparation as acts of nurturing and resistance during slavery and in its aftermath. In the freedom narratives, food stories played an integral role in reinforcing community identity and pride, as well as maintaining a shared cultural identity and memory (Armstrong, 2020). Additionally, food stories related to belonging and resistance were also beneficial in teaching younger generations how to “negotiate the aftermath of slavery and its racially imbued relationships” (p. 627). Based on this example, I call upon the Black women in my family to exemplify what it can look like to carve out spaces of agency and aliveness through food, by creating and sharing knowledge that has been used to survive and heal over four generations of women.

Research Objectives

In this study, I argue that the food and food-making practices of Black women serve as epistemological sites where knowledge is created and shared intergenerationally. The narratives of the women in my family reveal how they produce and transmit knowledge across generations. By centering these practices, this study illuminates how everyday acts of foodwork encode epistemic beliefs and values that sustain Black life and express aliveness (Quashie, 2021).

This research contributes to scholarship on alternative epistemologies and community literacies in education by centering the intergenerational knowledge and knowledge-making practices embedded in Black women's foodways. Drawing on interdisciplinary frameworks, such as Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 1990) and Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021), I highlight the innovative knowledge systems of Black women, offering critical insights into how everyday practices generate, transmit, and sustain knowledge in Black communities. Guided by these objectives, this study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What intergenerational knowledge do the Black women in my family share, and what new knowledge do they create, through food and food-making?
- 2) What do the stories they tell and uncover through their foods and food-making practices illuminate about Black aliveness?

Structure of Dissertation

Chapter two reviews literature on Black women's epistemologies in the context of food-making and storytelling and presents the theoretical frameworks guiding this study. Chapter three details the methodological approach that informs data collection and analysis. Chapter four presents the study's primary findings, illustrating how knowledge is generated, shared, and sustained within my extended kinship network. Finally, chapter five connects these findings to

Black feminist epistemologies (Collins, 1990) and the concept of Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021), highlighting the study's implications for educational research and offering recommendations for future inquiry.

Literature Review

I come to this work as a scholar and witness to the brilliance of Black women.

Historically, Black women have asserted their agency through their self-defined standpoints and knowledge-making processes (Collins, 2000; Dillard, 2006; Winn, 2010). Despite anti-black and gendered violence, we re/see, re/inhabit, and re/imagine new possibilities and worlds that maintain our being (Sharpe, 2016; Quashie, 2021). In doing so, our particular experiences and knowledge avail us with a way out of no way, as we tend to Black life and suffering in the wake of enslavement (Sharpe, 2016).

Living with this knowledge means that although we can expect the climate to be anti-black, as anti-blackness permeates our airways, waterways, and soil, we are equipped with unique, subaltern forms of knowledge that allow us to weather any storm (Sharpe, 2016). It is in this betwixt and between positioning that *we do, we live, we love, we try, we tire, we flee, we fight, we bleed, we break, we moan, we weep, we die, we do* (clifton, 1991), despite the antiblack forces predicated on our figurative and literal death (Sharpe, 2016).

Although anti-blackness condemns Black women to a life as the living dead (Patterson, 1982), our social and structural positioning offers us the knowledge to assert and sustain our being (McKittrick, 2021). For many Black women in my family, food, food-making, and storytelling are sources of knowledge that can help heal, nurture, and sustain our community. I, therefore, ground the everyday experiences and cultural practices of the Black women in my family within this context, situating our unique knowledge-making practices through food and family stories. As such, I offer my study as a meditation on the epistemologies of Black women, highlighting knowledge production that expands beyond the walls of U.S. educational institutions.

Context

Black women have access to an alternative epistemology that encompasses standards for assessing truths that are widely accepted among other Black women (Collins, 1990). Rooted in the experiences and materiality of Black womanhood, Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 1990) is concerned with the collective experiences and accompanying worldviews that Black women in the U.S. have sustained based on their shared history. Black women's epistemic beliefs and values are therefore situated in a web of praxis and theory that "attend to the multiple and overlapping presents that we face" (Sharpe, 2016, p. 22).

Stanfield (1993) argues that "the epistemological concerns in cultural research in the social sciences cannot be divorced from concerns regarding the functions of culturally hegemonic domination in knowledge production and dissemination" (p. 26). Stated otherwise, what constitutes knowledge is largely dependent on the validation processes and ethos of the community in which it is produced (Dillard, 2006). As such, Dillard (2006) suggests we engage "alternative epistemological truths" (p. 2) in educational research and praxis, which offer new methods for doing research in service of the people and communities we seek to study.

One way that we might conduct research in service of Black women and girls is by engaging an endarkened feminist epistemology (Dillard, 2006). An endarkened feminist epistemology offers an alternative methodological and theoretical approach to demystify "traditionally held political and cultural constructions/constrictions" (p. 2) and resist the epistemic oppression of Black women and girls. Dillard (2006) argues that this orientation is necessary if we are to challenge whose knowledge is deemed credible, legitimate, and worth knowing in the field of education. As such, I call on Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 1990)

and endarkened feminist epistemology (Dillard, 2006) to justify the necessity and urgency of my study, as well as the literature that informs it.

Since Black women and girls have their own way of grappling with and understanding their multiple realities (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2006), it was important for me to engage literature that highlights the knowledge-making practices of Black womenfolk. Especially given the ways that Black women and girls have traditionally been excluded from educational research and praxis (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2006). As such, I synthesize literature relevant to food, family stories, and the production of knowledge in the context of Black womenfolk.

I begin my literature review by providing an overview of the literature on food and family stories in education. Next, I engage in a discussion of interdisciplinary literature that bridges gaps in educational research regarding food and family stories. In doing so, I am to draw connections between cultural practices, such as foodways, storytelling, and knowledge production. I conclude my literature review by addressing how my study, a love letter to Black women and girls, will contribute to the field of education.

Food as a Form of Knowledge

In the past few decades, educational research has largely engaged food through the lens of health and nutrition (Truman & Elliot, 2019). Food, as a source of knowledge, however, remains largely undertheorized in educational research and praxis (Vigden & Gallegos, 2014). For this reason, I situate the literature on food education and food literacy in conversation with multidisciplinary literature on foodways (Bennett et al., 1942) and Black food geographies (Reese, 2019). In doing so, I aim to make the case that food is a valuable source of knowledge, especially relevant to my study, which seeks to highlight the epistemological beliefs and values of Black women.

Food Education

Sutter et al. (2019) define food education, commonly referred to as food literacy, as “education that supports learning about food, nutrition, and the role that food plays in one’s life, relationships, culture, communities, environment, and in history and society” (p. 995). As a discipline, food education encompasses discourse and literature on food access and equity (Nyéléni, 2007; Patel, 2009; Powell & Wittman, 2018; Sumner, 2011), curriculum (Amin et al., 2018; Contento, 2011; Sutter et al., 2019), and literacy (Cullen et al., 2015; Krause et al., 2016; Truman & Eliot, 2019; Vigden & Gallegos, 2014).

The work of Vigden and Gallegos (2014) is foundational to the development of food education literature, as it is the first time that food literacy has been empirically studied and defined in the context of education. Vigden and Gallegos (2014) emphasize food and eating as an everyday part of life that responds to, and is challenged by, “daily changes in individual, household, community, national, and global environments” (p. 50). In addition to social, political, and environmental factors, food education scholars also identify knowledge, skills, and behaviors as crucial components in the development of food literacies (Vigden & Gallegos, 2014). Vigden and Gallegos (2014) define food literacy as:

the scaffolding that empowers individuals, households, communities, or nations to protect diet quality through change and strengthen dietary resilience over time. It is composed of a collection of inter-related knowledge, skills, and behaviours required to plan, manage, select, prepare and eat food to meet needs and determine intake (p. 54).

In defining food literacy and its components, Vigden and Gallegos (2014) describe the tools needed for one to develop and sustain a healthy relationship with food.

Truman et al. (2017) build on the work of Vigden and Gallegos (2014) by further suggesting that food-related knowledge, as well as the skills, behaviors, and everyday experiences associated with it, are grounded in a social context. Through a scoping review of the literature, Truman et al. (2017) found that most literature on food education focuses on the social nature of food literacy and community food systems. Truman et al. (2017), therefore, suggest that food literacy has implications for how youth and young adults navigate their material conditions and the social systems that inform them.

As a result of their review of existing and emerging literature, Truman et al. (2017) found key themes related to the skills and knowledge that inform the development of food literacies. The authors refer to this knowledge as “the ability to understand and seek information about food” (Truman et al., 2017, p. 367). Truman et al. (2017) conclude their literature review by suggesting that food-related knowledge, and the skills, behaviors, and everyday experiences associated with it, are beneficial to the field of education as they can help reduce diet-related diseases and improve students’ relationships with food.

Although literature on food education and literacy is still growing, the work of Vigden and Gallegos (2014) and Truman et al. (2017) suggests that the study of food-related knowledge in educational research has implications for understanding how youth and young adults learn to navigate their material conditions and the social systems that inform them. However, in both of those foundational studies, food-related knowledge is deeply embedded in a context that primarily engages with diet, health, and nutrition, rather than with epistemic beliefs and values that can be learned through food (Truman et al., 2017; Vigden & Gallegos, 2014).

In the context of my study, I am primarily concerned with how food can serve as a conduit for creating and sharing knowledge, particularly among Black women and girls.

Therefore, I look beyond the field of education, such as Black studies and folklore studies, to fill this gap. In the following section, I review literature on foodways (Bennett et al., 1942) and Black food geographies (Reese, 2019) to make the case for food as a source of knowledge.

Interdisciplinary Insights on Food

Engaging anthropology, Black studies, folklore, and women's and gender studies, foodways offers a multidisciplinary approach to “teach students and the broader public to connect seemingly banal acts of growing, preparing, and consuming food with more trenchant social processes and problems” (Passidomo, 2018, p. 12). Scholars of foodways are largely concerned with the ways of preparing and consuming foods, as well as the routes that food objects travel (Thorsson, 2025). Twitty (2017) suggests that in many ways, the foodways of Black folks, especially southern Black folks, are a result of the hybridization of cultural and knowledge-making practices necessary to resist violence and disenfranchisement.

Recipes, cookbooks, and other “foodways literature” (p. 3) are often read and theorized alongside and in conversation with other creative works of nonfiction and in networks of Black women (Thorsson, 2016, 2025). Vertamae Grosvenor's 1970 cookbook, *Vibration Cooking: or, the Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl*, for instance, has taken on both a practical and theoretical orientation as a foundational text for African American foodways. Engaging foodways, Black feminist perspectives, and Black art, *Vibration Cooking* (Grosvenor, 1970) is a testament to how Black women have reclaimed their culinary and knowledge-making authority to cook and heal their way to freedom through recipes, remedies, and cultural knowledge. Grosvenor's (1970) work educates readers on the food, culture, and history of Black women in South Carolina, while also highlighting how African American foodways literature can engage Black liberation.

The recipes shared in *Vibration Cooking* are often accompanied by poems, narratives, or other anecdotes, rooted in both abstract and concrete methods for resisting oppression.

Grosvenor's (1970) recipe for smothered rabbit, for example, is accompanied by a story in which the author reflects on hunting with her father in the Southern Islands of South Carolina. As Grosvenor (1970) shares how to prepare smothered rabbit, she declares, "Black people got to have some land!" (p. 10). Through this recipe, the reader not only learns how to prepare a cultural dish, but also that holding land is intrinsic to Grosvenor's (1970) vision for Black liberation. As such, the work of Grosvenor (1970) is a strong exemplar for demonstrating how recipes and food-making have the power to teach lessons that can extend beyond their cultural and culinary contexts.

Williams-Forson (2006) further contributes to the literature on the foodways of Black women in the foundational text, *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power*. Relevant to literature on African American foodways, Williams-Forson (2006) examines the economic, political, and social impact of chicken in the lives of Black women in Virginia. Combining folktales, narratives, and stories with cultural and food-making practices that engage chicken, Williams-Forson (2006) highlights the knowledge of Black women and the way that they assert their agency through food-making.

In one case study, Williams-Forson (2006) highlights a community of Black women who earned an extra source of income by selling chicken to Black passengers traveling by train. With any leftover food remaining, the women would feed neighborhood children in need of a meal (Williams-Forson, 2006). Chicken, a common and ordinary food in the Black community, supported Black women economically and socially as a source for financial gain and a staple for cultural work. In this example, we see that food is more than a means to nourish the body, but

that historically, for the Black community, it has been used for commerce and cultural work, sustaining and supporting the autonomy and agency of Black folks (Williams-Forson, 2006).

The work of Grosvenor (1970) and Williams-Forson (2006) affirms that as Black women, we are our own archives and databases of knowledge and culture. Both foodways scholars show how Black women's relationship to food has offered spaces of creativity and resistance to support their being (Grosvenor, 1970; Williams-Forson, 2006). As such, their contributions offer food as a snapshot of the social, cultural, economic, and political lives of Black women (Grosvenor, 1970; Williams-Forson, 2006). To contextualize this snapshot, I explore literature relevant to Black food geographies. In doing so, I aim to understand how foodways are shaped by the specific knowledge-making practices and particularities of Black women.

Hawthorne (2019) describes the relationship between food and geography as a “particularly generative site of engagement, bringing traditional geographical concerns with nature, agrarian production, and political economy together with questions of Black space-making” (p. 5). In this way, food is the product of time, knowledge, and communal labor (Van Sant, 2016). Black food geographies offer a study of Black spatial knowledges related to “food production, as well as the ways Black communities past and present craft food security and sovereignty in the face of racialized dispossession” (Hawthorne, 2019, p. 5). Black food geographies also offer a macro- and micro-analysis of food apartheid in national and local foodscapes and examine how residents navigate this context on a daily basis (McCutcheon, 2015; Reese, 2019). In conversation with African American foodways, Black food geographies offer further insight into how Black women engage in knowledge-making through food, as evidenced by their routine acts of care and embodied food literacies.

Routine Acts of Care

Routine acts of care refer to communal, care-based practices that nurture present and future community members for cultural continuance (Reagon, 1986). Reagon (1986) notes, “among all living things in the universe, there is a nurturing process” (p. 87). Literature on routine acts of care reveals how Black women have historically organized to nurture and maintain their existence and the existence of their communities. Reagon (1986) cites the “nurturing space” (p. 87) or ground as the site where feeding and nurturing take place. Tyler (2020) builds Reagon’s (1986) work by offering insight into the cultural work of Black women who engage in feeding and mothering to nurture the mind, body, and soul through food.

Tyler (2020) especially emphasizes the role of Black women as leaders in Black food geographies by engaging food as a tool for survival and resistance. The Freedom Farm Cooperative, founded by Fannie Lou Hamer, is one example of this, as it enabled a Black community in Mississippi to address poverty and food insecurity by combining self-reliance and cultural work to create an agrarian co-operative society (Reese & Cooper, 2021; Tyler, 2020). The work of Tyler (2020) speaks to the work of African American foodways scholars by again reiterating that food is a tool of cultural work, a mechanism that Black women have historically used to organize around the immediate and long-term needs of their families and communities. Through sharing time, money, material resources, labor, and food, literature on Black food geographies supports that Black women continue to create and share care-based practices necessary for knowledge- and world-making in Black food geographies (Reese & Cooper, 2021; Tyler, 2020; Winston, 2023).

Embodied Food Literacies

Through memory and imagination, albeit painful, embodied food literacies speak to the reclamation of spatial imaginaries, acknowledging the trauma of enslavement while making space for self-reliance through a reestablished relationship with land (McKittrick, 2006; Ramirez, 2014). Embodied food literacies in the context of Black food geographies rely on “embodied knowledge” (p. 757), memory, and imagination to understand and make sense of the Black communities’ needs regarding food and food security (Ramirez, 2014). Defined by the relationship between the past, present, and future, embodied knowledge is felt and remembered as knowledge of food and land is passed generationally (Jones, 2019; McKittrick, 2006). Embodied food literacies also consider the needs of the land and how land can be used to resist anti-blackness, poverty, and hunger, for example (Ramirez, 2015).

Similarly to the assertions of Grosvenor (1970), Black geographers hold that land was intrinsic to Black autonomy during enslavement and its aftermath (Heynen, 2009; McKittrick, 2006; Ramirez, 2015; Woods, 1998). This practice, rooted in life beyond enslavement, encompasses a method of “holding ground” (p. 3) to make and sustain place (Winston, 2023). Holding ground highlights a historical approach to land ownership in which Black families and communities were able to achieve relative self-reliance through the land they tended to (Winston, 2022). By tending to the land and sharing communal responsibilities, Black families could survive and, at times, thrive during times of surplus (Winston, 2023).

Ramirez (2014) shares an example of this by highlighting Seattle food justice organization, Clean Greens. This organization is particularly relevant because it situates land as “a tool of liberation” (p. 757) that can address structural inequalities related to the production and distribution of sustainably grown food (Ramirez, 2014). In this example, Ramirez (2014)

highlights the connection between the socio-political and historical context in which food is entangled with emotions, memories, and perceptions often connected to our histories of enslavement, sharecropping, and land dispossession (Ramirez, 2014).

It is worth noting that beyond the context of foodways and Black food geographies, Black women have received little acknowledgment for their knowledge of food, geography, and sustainability (McCutcheon, 2019; Thorsson, 2025). Despite founding freedom farms, creating community gardens, and making a way out of no way, dominant narratives have rendered Black women, their food-making, and cultural practices as insignificant (Williams-Forson, 2006). In my study, I aim to bridge this gap by highlighting Black women as expert knowledge makers in our own unique contexts, using our own knowledge-making practices.

In conversation with Black food geographies, literature on community and family stories offers insight into how knowledge is traditionally shared amongst Black women, especially in the context of food. I vividly remember learning how to make potato salad with my mom. She did not teach me by measuring out the ingredients or looking at a written recipe, but rather through storytelling. I remember my mom recalling a story of how her Aunt Julia's potato salad tasted, and how hers is just as good as Julia's, *if not better now*.

As she told her story, I did what my mom did, mirroring her and tasting as we went. This is how I learned how to make potato salad. Reflecting on this cherished memory reminded me that to make sense of my family's knowledge-making processes, I needed to also engage my family's stories. As such, I engage literature that situates storytelling as a valuable method in the creation and sharing of knowledge.

Storytelling as a Form of Knowledge

Anderson et al. (2000) insist that “we live our lives inside an endless network of stories” (p. 72). In a study of the psychological role of narratives, Bruner (1986) claims that through storytelling, we construct worlds and landscapes affected and constructed by our culture. Bruner (1986) further suggests this process can open individuals to problem-solving and worldmaking. In the field of education, Witherell and Noddings (1991) focus on the healing effects of constructing narratives. In *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*, the collection of essays reflects on the power of narratives to teach and learn about our own lives and those around us (Witherell & Noddings, 1991). Witherell and Noddings (1991) further suggest that:

Through telling, writing, reading, and listening to life stories—one’s own and others’—those engaged in this work can penetrate cultural barriers, discover the power of the self and integrity of the other, and deepen the power of the self and integrity of the other; and deepen their understanding of their respective histories and possibilities (p. 4).

Hughes et al. (2022) support that storytelling is “a way to get people thinking about viewpoints beyond their own as well as to express our experiences to others” (p. 17). Hughes et al. (2022) argue that historically, humans have been drawn to storytelling as a medium for making connections and sharing knowledge and values (Hughes et al., 2022; Newkirk, 2014). In their study engaging storytelling as a means to facilitate learning and connection in one learning community, Hughes et al. (2022) found that stories played an important role in the development of knowledge and community in the focus group. This finding is supported by Lawson-Te Aho (2014), who also affirms that in community settings, storytelling contributes to the restoration of cultural identity and collective memory necessary for resistance and healing.

Similarly, Chioneso et al. (2020) found storytelling to be an effective intervention for healing and building community. Chioneso et al. (2020) describe healing as “an ongoing multilevel process by whereby oppressed groups strengthen their connectedness and collective memory through culturally syntonc processes in ways that promote critical consciousness to achieve optimal states of justice” (p. 100). Healing through storytelling, then, is understood by its relationality and locality, to one’s community rather than individualism (Chioneso et al., 2020). This distinction is important because, for racially marginalized groups, community healing does not occur in isolation. But rather, healing is a community endeavor that engages the mind, body, and spirit through collective memory and care, to repair and sustain harm caused by suffering and racial trauma (Chioneso et al., 2020; Myers, 2013; Somé, 1993).

This focus on storytelling as healing implies that storytelling is not about the individual storyteller but rather the context in which the storyteller engages with their community and other participants (Hydén, 2013). Hydén (2013) stresses the importance of collaborative storytelling as well as the engagement of embodied storytelling. Hydén (2013) suggests that when someone tells a story, they use their bodies as “communicative resources” (p. 360) that ascribe meaning to written or verbalized speech. Conversational storytelling, especially, engages this embodied process as we tell and listen to stories (Hydén, 2013). Storytelling, then, is less about its traditional textual modality and more about the relationship between the storyteller, listeners, and the body, engaging all semiotic resources (Hydén, 2013).

Family Storytelling

Rowe (2022) asserts that storytelling is crucial for understanding Black women’s particularities and is a tool for producing knowledge. In the context of family stories, this is especially important given that families often serve as “the first story-sharing arena” (p. 120) in

which one learns to make sense of themselves and the world around them (Thomas, 2020). Alice Walker (1983) writes about the urgency of telling family stories, especially Black women's stories, as she reflects on time spent with her mother. She writes:

Through the years of listening to my mother's stories of her life, I have absorbed not only the stories themselves, but something of the manner in which she spoke, something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories—like her life—must be recorded (p. 240).

In Walker's (1983) quote, she speaks to the nature of Black women's stories, shared from woman to woman, offering knowledge and wisdom. The literature supports that women, especially mothers, are most likely to maintain their family stories, often by learning, remembering, and retelling them to others (Baldwin, 1985; Benoit, 1997; Ochs & Taylor, 1992; Stone, 1988). According to Stone (1988), the major function of family stories is often to support identity development and teach problem-solving strategies. Rowe (2022) builds on this understanding by suggesting how Black women have historically used storytelling to mobilize and share their experiences, affirming their agency and dignity.

In the context of my study, this finding is especially important given the knowledge being shared through my family's food stories. Boylorn (2017) shares that for Black women, our stories not only challenge and expand our representation in dominant narratives, but they also offer insight into how we heal from and resist our oppression. I therefore offer storytelling as a way to pass knowledge that is used to heal and sustain our humanity (Marshall, 2001).

Historically, for the Black diasporic community, storytelling has provided Black women with the tools to reciprocate knowledge and wisdom through non-verbal and verbal forms of communication (Dillard, 2006). Pinkóla Estés (1995) speaks to the fluidity with which women of

color engage in storytelling to hold and pass on knowledge. Pinkóla Estés (1995) further argues that storytelling has helped women learn to honor our emotional and mental health.

Black women's intellectual thought and ways of knowing honor the "unacknowledged, unpublished, unconscious body of knowledge" (p. 17) that exists beyond the academy and educational institutions (Holiday, 2010). And although Black women's experiences and knowledge-making practices are not widely published, it does not mean that this knowledge does not exist (Holiday, 2010). Black women have historically positioned themselves as critical knowers and doers without the validation of the ivory towers that seek to define and validate what knowledge is and is not (Baker-Fletcher, 2006; Banks-Wallace, 2000; Copeland, 2006; Holiday, 2010; Walker, 1983).

Storytelling as a Form of Healing

hooks (1999) asserts, "Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion" (p. 215). From this womanist perspective, healing is a process that engages the self as the individual but also within a larger community context (Holiday, 2019; hooks, 1999). Within this context, healing is distinctively rooted in the communal and gendered knowledge-making practices of Black women who navigate the hostile landscape of anti-blackness and misogyny (Holiday, 2019).

Holiday (2019) argues that for narratives to be rooted in the healing of Black women, they must be anchored in protection and interventions that support health and well-being. One way that this can be achieved is through family and community narratives, rooted in healing, that rely on the body and memory as therapeutic tools in the construction and sharing of community narratives (Holiday, 2010).

From this perspective, our healing is reliant on the healing of our communities and the development of a collectivist orientation (Holiday, 2010; McNeal et al., 2024). Stated otherwise, as our wounds heal, so do the wounds of our family and kinfolk, and therefore, it is through community liberation that the possibility for individual liberation and freedom is possible (Holiday, 2010). As such, healing narratives must center the lived experiences and voices of the Black women in our communities (Barlow & Dill, 2018; McNeal et al., 2024).

This orientation serves as a means for Black women to engage their standpoints and generational wisdom through storytelling and bearing witness (McNeal et al., 2024). Engaging in this work requires Black women to cultivate spaces to dream and reimagine our lives, communities, and hopes for the future through healing methods such as storytelling (McNeal et al., 2024). As our stories guide and, in a sense, heal us, Black women engage in the alchemy of turning dirt into gold and oppression into liberation (Comas-Díaz & Greene, 1996; Holiday, 2010; Lincoln & Mamiya, 2003; McNeal et al., 2024).

Gaps in Literature

The epistemological roots of white supremacy remain dominant throughout the academy and educational institutions (Bauman & Briggs, 2003; Conquergood, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Fricker, 2007; Mills, 1994; Mills, 1997). Credible knowledge makers are defined by their ability to utilize valid and reliable methods rooted in white epistemic standards (Collins, 2000; Mills, 1994; Mills, 1997). Simultaneously, pervasive anti-blackness in the education system informs the epistemic violence that shapes and legitimizes the power and privilege of knowing and knowledge production (Coles, 2016; Dumas, 2016; Dumas & ross, 2016; Ferguson, 2000; Jennings & Lynn, 2005).

Academic research has largely excluded ways of knowing rooted in embodied experiences, oralities, and local particularities in favor of objective and factual forms of knowledge (Collins, 2000; Conquergood, 2002). This imbalance in knowledge representation has contributed to the marginalization of subjugated knowledge, such as Black epistemologies. This knowledge relies on memory and embodied knowledge to carve out spaces of agency and struggle through everyday racialized performances and knowledge-making practices (Conquergood, 2002).

I am mainly concerned with the epistemological beliefs and values of Black women who experience subjugation based on race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989). Like other subjugated groups, Black women have developed alternative ways of creating and validating knowledge (Collins, 2012). However, this specialized knowledge remains illegitimate and bastardized within social institutions that adhere to white epistemological standards. While we should make space for subjugated knowledge in educational and academic research, I caution positioning Black epistemologies in opposition to white epistemic beliefs.

Black epistemologies exist and need not be proven, explained, or validated by whiteness. Instead, I argue that the epistemologies of Black women should be used to magnify the voices and truths of Black women in the U.S. This literature review seeks to redefine knowing in educational research by highlighting the subaltern and subjugated epistemologies of Black women. Lastly, it synthesizes literature across multiple disciplines to reimagine how an undisciplined (Sharpe, 2016) approach to educational research can provide a more humanizing analysis of the lived experiences of Black women and girls.

Gordon (1990) argues that “while there are well-respected Black educational scholars whose works are being published and reviewed in mainstream journals, their ideas, theories, and

experiences have not significantly affected the prevailing paradigms and ideology within the scholarly community” (p. 89). The under-theorization of Black women’s epistemic beliefs and values in educational research therefore requires us to engage other disciplines.

Prescod-Weinstein (2022) asserts, “Black liberation work is disruptive to disciplining, to disciplines. Black livingness is made possible by Black resistance and transcendent, made possible, recursively, by its undeniability” (p. 2). Relying largely on memory and racialized practices, Black women have developed and used their unique epistemologies to carve out spaces of agency and struggle through everyday acts and performances such as cooking, gardening, worshipping, and homemaking (Butler, 2018; Collins, 1990; Conquergood, 2002). Through the seemingly mundane and ordinary, Black women have created and shared knowledge to understand the world and shape their futures (Hawthorne, 2019).

In this study, I specifically highlight the engagement of food and geography in the creation and sharing of this specialized knowledge. I aim to redefine what knowledge is and who is worthy of creating and holding it. By refusing white hegemonic understandings of knowing, I center the humanity and agency of the Black women in my family who have shaped the geographies and terrains of epistemic resistance and refusal. In doing so, I consider what it might look like to use mods and methods of research and teaching relevant to Black women’s epistemic beliefs and values.

Bell (1992) reminds us of the fortitude of Black folks who, despite “knowing there was no escape, no way out... continued to engage themselves. To carve out humanity. To defy the murder of selfhood” (p. 197). This study is a testament to the fortitude of the Black women in my family. It is the answer to their call. As our landmarks are changed and destroyed, and our histories banned and removed from websites, this work is of the utmost importance and urgency.

It is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen. My mom taught me my way around the kitchen and how to talk to food. It is through her sacrifice and vetting that I can tell my family's stories.

I enter this work with a spirit of thanksgiving and eternal gratitude for the praying mothers, grandmothers, and aunties, whose knowledge and food-making have healed and sustained us for generations. By redefining what knowledge is and who is worthy of creating and holding it, I take up space and center the voices at the margins of society. In refusing white hegemonic understandings of knowing, I aim to affirm the humanity and agency of the Black women who continue to shape worlds of resistance and refusal.

*“I came to theory because I was hurting—
the pain within me was so intense
that I could not go on living.
I came to theory desperate,
wanting to comprehend—
around and within me.
Most importantly,
I wanted to make the hurt go away.
I saw in theory then
a location for healing”
(hooks, 1994, p.59)*

Theoretical Framework

Food Power Politics: The Food Story of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement opens with a quote from chef Omar Tate that states, “food is a weapon that been used against us, but food is also a shield” (Smith, 2023, p. 1). This quote rings true metaphorically, but also in a literal sense, as “food has been used as a weapon to reinforce racial dominance since the beginning of slavery in America” (Smith, 2023, p. 1). Smith (2023) asserts that “in their memoirs, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs recalled how slave masters would withhold food to control enslaved people and starve them into submission” (p. 1).

And yet, even in the face of enslavement, Black folks continued to resist, oftentimes through food (Smith, 2023). Smith (2023) asserts, “...Black activists in the South and beyond created their own food mechanisms to shield themselves from the weaponization of food that sought to control their food realities” (p. 2). In the face of coercion, dehumanization, and violence, enslaved people used food as a form of resistance on plantations, creating hidden garden plots (Smith, 2023), maintaining cultural food traditions (Harris, 2011; Navarro, 2022,

Williams-Forson, 2022), and even poisoning the food of their enslavers (Deetz, 2017; Porter, 2025). From this perspective, critically engaging food as a site of liberation and resistance gives way to “fundamental questions of racism, resistance, Black freedom, white supremacy, inequality, and justice” (Smith, 2023, p. 142).

The critical examination of food as a site of liberation and resistance also requires us to consider how food is organized along the lines of race and gender (Allen & Sachs, 2007). Allen and Sachs (2007) suggest, “women’s involvement with food constructs who they are in the world—as individuals, family members, and workers—in deep, complex, and often contradictory ways” (p. 1). In regard to Black women, food-making is largely characterized as “women’s work” (p. 13), illustrating the gendered nature of food (Smith, 2023). Due to the presupposed, gendered nature of cooking and food-making, Smith asserts (2023) that Black women, and their contributions, are often rendered invisible, as food-making practices are largely considered *natural* and *ordinary* activities for Black women.

My study seeks to challenge this assumption by increasing the visibility of Black women, whose foodways often function as “cultural armor” (West, 1993, p. 18) that sustains Black life (Smith, 2023). Cornell West (1993) describes cultural armor as buffers that contain “cultural structures of meaning and feeling” (p. 18) that create and sustain Black life. Cultural armor shapes the “ways of life and struggle” (West, 1993, p. 18) that embody care, discipline, love, and sacrifice, and resist structures and systems of oppression. This study, therefore, engages *food as a shield*, positing ways that Black women use food as cultural armor, resisting anti-black and gendered oppression (Smith 2023; West, 1993).

It is with great honor and urgency that I share my family’s food stories that contain knowledge and wisdom of our foodways and thus aliveness (Quashie, 2021). As our most

cherished recipes, ingredients, and food stories come together around communal spaces and foodways, I am reminded of the knowledge and wisdom of the Black women in my family as we hold and eat time. I offer these stories in hopes that they will continue to sustain future generations and teach others how to do the same. I offer the following questions as a meditation that guides my study:

- 1) What intergenerational knowledge do the Black women in my family share, and what new knowledge do they create, through food and food-making?
- 2) What do the stories they tell and uncover through their foods and food-making practices illuminate about Black aliveness?

As I heavily use gendered language in this study, I find it extremely important to note that gender is not a stable, or biological, identity that I cling to in the theoretical underpinnings of this work (Butler, 1988). Rather, I consider it to be a critical marker, albeit socially constructed, that serves as an indicator for how power and identity converge to form racialized and gendered bodies and thus our lived experiences (Butler, 1988). Stated otherwise by Simone de Beauvoir (1952), “one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman” (p. 172). I therefore reject naturalistic explanations of gender and sexuality that limit gendered experiences to physiology. To do so is to reject the coloniality of gender and instead underscore the complicated sociohistorical process by which we learn and embody what it means to be a racialized and gendered body (Butler, 1988; de Beauvoir, 1952). I reject colonial and naturalistic understandings of gender, to give space to the racialized and gendered body in all of its expressions and experiences in the material world (Butler, 1988; de Beauvoir, 1952). In taking on this stance, I further position my study in alignment with the complete and total liberation of *all* Black people, again reiterating that nobody’s free until everybody’s free (Hamer, 1971).

In this study, I also ground my assumptions with the acknowledgment that racism and anti-blackness are permanent (Dumas, 2016). The challenge of anti-blackness is in the assertion that there has been no clear historical moment in which there has been a break between slavery and the acknowledgment of Black citizenship and humanity in the U.S. (Dumas, 2016; Fanon, 1967; Sexton, 2011; Wilderson et al., 2017). Sexton (2011) further reminds us that despite symbolic gains and fleeting moments of racial progress, Black people are still socially positioned and ontologically chained by the institutional remnants of enslavement. My study is therefore situated in the knowledge that today, tomorrow, and even yesterday, antiblackness remains endemic and fixed, and thus shapes the conditions, experiences, and violence faced by Black folks (Dumas, 2016). As such, anti-blackness socially and structurally positions Black folks as socially dead (Patterson, 1982). State-sanctioned violence, literally and metaphorically, is thereby justified and necessary to maintain anti-blackness and social death (Dumas, 2016; Patterson, 1982; Sexton, 2011).

And yet, aliveness also exists in resistance and refusal to the anti-black systems and structures that have rendered us dead (Quashie, 2021). Quashie (2021) contends that “antiblackness is part of blackness, but not all of how or what blackness is. Antiblackness is total in the world, but it is not total in the black world” (p. 5). Here, Quashie (2021) alludes to an imaginary in which aliveness is possible and “blackness gushes with existence” (p. 31), offering a theoretical framing, rooted in the spiritual beliefs and practices of Black women, that shape and undergird the knowing and doing of aliveness.

Black Aliveness

*Though the haunting of enslavement
ensnares our very souls,
how we live out these traumas
in our everyday lives*

*manifests in the ways
we perform life.*
(Williams-Forson, 2022, p. 61)

Quashie (2021) asserts, “aliveness, then, is not action but something else, perhaps what political theorist Jane Bennett describes as vibrant matter, ‘a liveliness intrinsic to the materiality of the one thing’ or the power that constitutes ‘the force of things’” (Bennett, 2010, as cited in Quashie, 2021, p.16). To better understand Quashie’s (2021) theorization of Black aliveness, I carefully describe what Black aliveness *is*—and what *it is not*. Aliveness is a condition of human *knowing* and *being*, both embodied and experiential, in the metaphysical and physical worlds (Quashie, 2021). It is the material and immaterial force of and in being, generated by the self and the self’s relationship to the force of aliveness (Quashie, 2021). Ubiquitous and present in every being in a Black world, aliveness eludes quantification and qualification. Black aliveness, then, is not an exact synonym of life, nor does it substantiate who is worthy of being alive based on sovereignty and hierarchies of worthiness (Quashie, 2021).

In Quashie’s (2021) imaginary of a Black world, aliveness is “the becoming of beingness, the sensations that inhabit one’s body in its existence and that constitute intelligence, the way that ‘bodies think as they feel’” (Massumi, 2002, as cited in Quashie, 2021, p. 20). Based on this understanding, aliveness engages life not as it is, but how it is in a Black world, engaging Black epistemological and ontological imaginaries (Quashie, 2021). This is not to say that the interiority of Black aliveness is unconnected to the public, political, and social world, but rather, that in “invoking a black world and suspending antiblack logics” (p. 20), we can use aliveness to guide our phenomenological consciousness and inform how we navigate the exterior world from a position of aliveness (Quashie, 2021).

As a theoretical framework, I engage Black aliveness as, “a philosophical habitat that sustains being” and propels one into “any possible manner of existence” (Quashie, 2021, p. 142). Doing so allows me to focus on the interiority of the Black world and the knowing and being of the Black women in my study who co-habit it. This orientation also allows me to analyze how the Black women in my study move collectively, through regard and relationship with one another, to actualize and pursue their aliveness (Quashie, 2021). Given the *ethical orientation* of aliveness within a larger world that is *not ethically oriented*, I call upon womanism (Phillips, 2006; Walker, 1983) to make sense of how the Black women in my study move in relation to one another and their environments, to create and sustain ecologies that maintain their aliveness (Baldwin, 2024; Quashie, 2021). Although Black aliveness serves as the central interpretive framework of this study, womanism (Phillips, 2006; Walker, 1983) and Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 1990) function as complementary lenses for understanding the ethical, epistemic, and methodological practices through which aliveness is sustained in my family.

Womanism

Womanism, coined by Alice Walker (1983), is a “social change perspective rooted in Black women’s and other women of color’s everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem-solving in everyday spaces” (Phillips, 2006, p. xx). Womanism links gender to the social construction of race and class, centering Black womanhood as the starting point from which any societal problem can be addressed. The everyday vernacular of womanism connects people, nature, and spirituality to an ethos of care and love for self, community, nature, and all living things (Phillips, 2006). Womanism is particularly useful in this framework because it strengthens my analysis of how the women in my family learn and come to be in relation to others in their kinship network. Where I seek to understand how Black women create, share, and

validate knowledge through food and under conditions of racialized and gendered oppression, womanism helps explain the ethical, spiritual, and communal orientations through which knowledge and aliveness are enacted in everyday life.

Rooted in the totality and connectedness of the mind and body, theory and practice, and self and community (Phillips, 2006; Walker, 1983), womanism supports me in positioning Black women's ways of knowing as inseparable from the everyday practices they engage in to care, tend to, protect, nourish, and sustain one another and their communities. This orientation is central to how I understand aliveness operating in the lives of the women in my family as they create and share knowledge through food. For many Black families, mine included, food is the preferred medium for love and care, and the conduit through which family stories, containing knowledge of aliveness, are passed and shared intergenerationally (Navarro, 2022; Nettles-Barcelón et al., 2015; Thorsson, 2025; Williams-Forsen, 2006). Historically, knowledge of food and the foodways of Black families and communities were necessary to resist anti-black violence and deprivation (Twitty, 2017). Food, therefore, highlights and informs specialized epistemological underpinnings that sustain our being and sense of aliveness (Crawley, 2016; Baldwin, 2024; Griffin & Turner, 2021; Quashie, 2021).

Smith (2022) argues that “in a world where Black people are deemed inferior, Black women operate in the shadows of time and space, transforming food into a portal for the sustainability of Black life” (p. 566). Using food to make sense of and overcome the challenges of racialized and gendered violence, the Black women in my family express “love, nurturance, creativity, sharing, patience, [and] economic frustration” (Hughes, 1997, p. 272), necessary for resistance and the maintenance of Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021). I engage womanism to name this ethical, moral, and spiritual labor, and to reveal how Black women in my family cultivate

ecologies of aliveness (Baldwin, 2024; Quashie, 2021) through ordinary, yet profound, acts of care.

As Black women have historically resisted and refused oppressive conditions through everyday, do-it-yourself methods, this struggle for survival has equipped us with unique and specialized knowledge that has maintained our aliveness (Phillips, 2006; Quashie, 2021). For instance, recipes in my family are often remembered and not written down. If a recipe is lost, then, literally or figuratively (e.g., cancer, death, dementia), the recipes can be recreated from memory using embodied knowledge (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) and the senses. Alternatively, as later generations continue to create and co-create knowledge of aliveness, recipes can change and adapt to meet the needs of present and future generations (Brady, 2011).

For example, when my grandma first learned how to make greens, she would forage train tracks for field greens. Today, since field greens are no longer widely available, she uses the best-looking collard greens we can find for the best price. Additionally, due to a family medical history of high-blood pressure, we now use smoked turkey and less salt when cooking. This is a modification my mom took to take better precautions with her health and the health of the elders she cares for. These are just a few examples of how our specialized and gendered knowledge has been used to affirm and sustain aliveness in our family intergenerationally.

Grounding Black aliveness in understandings of womanism (Phillips, 2006; Walker, 1983) allows me to contextualize Black aliveness in the of context and everyday ethical practices and spiritual beliefs of Black women (Quashie, 2021). In a literal and metaphorical sense, aliveness (Quashie, 2021) is made possible through the women in my family's relationship with one another, their environment, and the food they serve around their kitchen tables. Black aliveness, then, gives me the language to engage a black world—and its multitude of imaginaries

that foster the ethical and philosophical conditions necessary for sustaining our being and personhood, even in the face of anti-black and gendered violence (Quashie, 2021).

In the case of my family, our foodways serve as an example of how we have maintained our aliveness, highlighting how we use our knowledge and knowledge of being to navigate a world that has presumptuously rendered us dead (Quashie, 2021). This analysis offers a deeper understanding of how Black women engage their kinship structures and foodways to leverage their epistemological knowledge of knowing and being to resist anti-blackness in the pursuit of aliveness (Quashie, 2021). Where Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021) informs how I analyze the philosophy of knowing and being, and womanism (Phillips, 2006) informs the ethos and ethics of being, I turn to Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 1990) to make sense of the epistemic values and beliefs that shape how Black women in my family create and share knowledge through their foodways to sustain their being.

Black Feminist Epistemologies

Gordon (1990) conceptualizes Black epistemologies as, “the study or theory of the knowledge generated out of the African-American existential condition, that is, of the knowledge and cultural artifacts produced by African-Americans based on African-American cultural, social, economic, and political experience” (p. 90). This body of cultural knowledge “transcends disciplinary lines in science, social theory, art, philosophy, and other fields (Gordon, 1990, p. 100). Black women, in particular, have access to a specific and gendered epistemology that encompasses standards for assessing truths that are widely accepted among Black women (Collins, 1990).

An experiential, material base underlies a Black feminist epistemology that identifies collective experiences and accompanying worldviews that Black women in the U.S. have

sustained through a shared history (Collins, 1990). This alternative epistemology uses different standards that are consistent with Black women's criteria for substantiated knowledge, based on a specific criterion for evaluating methodological adequacy (Collins, 1990). For most Black women, individuals who have lived through the experience(s) about which they claim to be knowledgeable are more believable than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences (Collins, 1990).

A Black feminist epistemology, therefore, centers lived experience as a criterion for credibility when asserting knowledge claims. In this study, Black feminist epistemology enables me to interpret oral histories, remembered recipes, embodied cooking practices, and intergenerational storytelling as legitimate forms of knowledge, rather than family tradition alone. As an analytic tool, Black feminist epistemologies strengthen my study by allowing me to better highlight the epistemic beliefs and values of Black women that are deeply situated within our own individual and collective experiences (Collins, 1990). As only Black women know the experiences of being a Black woman, it is through "talking with and for each other" (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016, p. 304) that Black women can construct meaning from experiences that can be self-discovered and defined (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016).

From this perspective, Black feminist knowledge is earned through experience, which largely occurs in community with other Black women. Based on this understanding, Black women not only shape and define their knowledge-making processes but also validate and vet the claims of knowledge-makers based on the collective and commonly held standpoints of Black women (Collins, 1990). Standpoint epistemology, for example, acknowledges the conceptual orientation of Black women's knowledge-making practices through self-discovery and self-definition (Collins, 1990; Cooper, 1988; May, 2007). While there is a fluidity and

multiplicity to the experiences of Black women and girls, Black feminist epistemologies emphasize how Black women rely on both individual and shared knowledge practices in both embodied and experiential contexts (Collins, 1990; Cooper, 1988, May, 2007).

Endarkened Feminist Epistemologies

While Black feminist epistemology clarifies how Black women generate and validate knowledge, endarkened feminist epistemology extends this analysis to the research process by challenging conventional research norms and centering embodiment and relationality in the knowledge-making and research process. Stanfield (1993) argues, “the epistemological concerns in cultural research in the social sciences cannot be divorced from concerns regarding the functions of culturally hegemonic domination in knowledge production and dissemination” (p. 26). Stated otherwise, what constitutes knowledge is largely dependent on the validation processes and ethos of the community in which it was produced (Dillard, 2006). As such, Dillard suggest, “alternatives epistemological truths” (p. 2) in educational research and praxis, that offer new methods for doing research in service of the people and communities we seek to study.

Dillard (2006) offers an *endarkened feminist epistemology* that demystify, “traditionally held political and cultural constructions/constrictions” (p. 2) to resist the epistemic oppression of Black women and girls. Rooted in Black feminist thought, endarkened feminist epistemology articulates the embodied nature of knowledge and knowledge production through the cultural standpoint of Black women (Dillard, 2006). This cultural standpoint is “located in the intersection/overlap of the culturally constructed socializations of race, gender, and other identities, and the historical and contemporary contexts of oppression and resistance for African American women” (Dillard, 2006, p. 3).

Through endarkened feminist epistemology, language and literacy are situated in an epistemic context that provides Black women with a way to understand and grapple with their multiple realities (Asante, 1988; Dillard, 2006; Morrison, 1993; Thiongo, 1986). In this specific context, language and literacy possess a fluidity and instrumentality rooted in the *doingness* of knowing and knowledge production, created and validated for us by us (Dillard, 2006). Dillard (2006) argues that this orientation is necessary to challenge how we understand the relationship “between the researcher and the researched, between knowing and the production of knowledge” (p. 4).

Centering the narratives of Black women and the embodied nature of Black women’s epistemic knowledge, endarkened feminist epistemology offers a theoretical alternative for engaging and understanding bodies of knowledge that have traditionally been excluded from educational research and praxis (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2006). Thus, endarkened feminist epistemology offers an additional approach to educational research rooted in the knowledge and lived experiences of Black women and girls (Dillard, 2006).

In this study, I aim to redefine what knowledge is and who is worthy of creating and holding it. By refusing white hegemonic understandings of knowing, I center the agency and humanity of the Black women in my family who have shaped epistemic resistance and refusal. In doing so, I use Black feminist epistemologies to engage a theoretical stance rooted in the experiences and knowledge of Black women.

Conceptual Model: *Wholly Built on Smoke...*

Shortly after its establishment as Britain’s first settlement in the Americas, Virginia became known for the cultivation of tobacco (Melilo, 2011). Like pepper, potatoes, and tomatoes, tobacco (*Nicotiana*) is a member of the nightshade (*Solanaceae*) family. With forty-

five *Nicotiana* species native to the Americas, the Gold Leaf Orinoco became the bread and butter of the Virginia colony. Sweet, delicate, and mild, Orinoco became Virginia's most lucrative cash crop.

By the 1700's, tobacco became a highly demanded commodity, akin to the enslaved Africans forced to cultivate its leaves (Melilo, 2011). Between 1700 and 1780, more than 80,000 enslaved Africans arrived at Virginia's ports, where they were auctioned and sold to tobacco plantations across the Tidewater region (Melilo, 2011). Among those enslaved were my ancestors, who shape the theoretical and methodological orientation of this study.

As previously stated, Black aliveness is a philosophical habitat of knowing and being, shaped by Black epistemological and ontological imaginaries (Quashie, 2021). My conceptual model further emphasizes Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021) while refusing the humanization of blackness through commonly held notions of liberal humanism (Jackson, 2020). In doing so, I reject an emphasis on widely held hierarchies and views that convolute racialized animalization, as well as the consequences and limitations of universal humanism (Jackson, 2020). Jackson (2020) asserts:

Slavery and colonialism not only catalyzed the conscription of black people into hegemonically imperialist and racialized conceptions of "modernity" and "universal humanity" but also inaugurated Western modernity's condition of possibility, initiating a chain of events that have given rise to a transnational, capitalist order (p. 45).

Here, Jackson (2020) situates the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade as a site of epochal rupture based on a ledger system that legitimized the purchase of Black beings as livestock and household objects. It is through this ledger that humanity was calculated and dislocated through the

“mathematics of unliving” (McKittrick, 2014, p. 17), maintaining the social death of those enslaved with each and every bill of purchase (Jackson, 2020).

Wilderson et al. (2017) remind us that the humanity of the enslaved was not only denied or excluded but also met with abjection and criminalization that justified subordination and violence. Based on this understanding, I view humanization not as an antidote to the violence of slavery, but rather as directly related to slavery’s role in calculating and producing different degrees of humanity (Jackson, 2020). Blackness, then, functions not only as a negative relation, but also as a “fleshly being that stabilizes and gives form to human and animal as categories” (p. 48). This stratification of humanity based on racialized animalization preemptively excluded “black participation in the symbolic order” (p. 49), extending human recognition, only to serve further objectivation (Jackson, 2020). This recognition of the humanity of the *slave*, therefore, serves as a fundamental and onto-epistemological site that determined what kind of human “black(end)” (p. 49) people represent, as well as the degrees between human and animal (Jackson, 2020).

Today, the bestialization of blackness remains a point of contention and contradiction in liberal humanism (Jackson, 2020). This refusal is the result of three presuppositions rooted in liberal humanism:

First, “the animal” lacks perspective; second, “the African” is an animal in the form of a human and thus, is devoid of the achievement of Reason or the full realization of perspective; and third, because “the animal”—human and nonhuman—is lacking, animality disqualifies one from ethical consideration (p. 60).

Here, we see that liberal humanism is entangled with contradictions as it relates to the Black being (Jackson, 2020; Ryan, 2025). The fact is that Black people have and continue to be

violently excluded from the doctrines and principles of Enlightenment and Reason, even when we subscribe to its human and carceral logics (Bruce, 2021; Ryan, 2025). This positioning as other-than or less-than human, has, however, provided us with a grammar and posture that allow us to transfigure our own onto-epistemological stances. In doing so, we come to know and understand our being beyond the stratification of humanity (Ryan, 2025; Sharpe, 2016).

Situating my conceptual model in Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021) allows me to challenge the paradoxical nature of human recognition and relational hierarchies produced by liberal humanism's biopolitical logics (Jackson, 2020). In doing so, I reconsider how we can define our being, without reiterating and reproducing ideals and measurements of *the human*, that have commonly been used to position us as animals devoid of feelings and Reasoned perspectives (Jackson, 2020). At the same time, situating the state of abject *human* animality through the lens of Black aliveness allows me to rethink and reexamine how despite slavery's "transmogrification of the black(end)'s being" (Jackson, 2020, p. 81), there exists an interior Black world that gushes with existence (Quashie, 2021). As such, my conceptual map concerns itself first and foremost with aliveness to problematize the ontological position of humanizing blackness and to reject the biopolitical arrangement and measurement of humanity (Jackson, 2020).

On Tobacco...Plants That Teach

In my conceptual model, I use the tobacco plant as a metaphor for aliveness (Quashie, 2021) that extends beyond racial-capitalist and settler-colonial dialectics. Although this work is not an in-depth theorization of racial capitalism (Robinson, 2019) or settler colonialism (Wolfe, 2006), I find these frameworks necessary for contextualizing the tobacco plant and its intimate relationship with Black and Native communities in what we now call the United States. Settler

colonialism names the structural process through which the violent dispossession of Native lives and territories is not only enacted and constituted but justified to maintain settler dominance and a new social order (Wolfe, 2006).

Intertwined in this process is the accumulation of capital through exploitation and racialized divisions of labor, what Robinson (2019) theorizes as racial capitalism. These mutually reinforcing structures work together, systematically organizing land and people as disposable resources to be commodified and accumulated to benefit white settlers and strengthen the settler state. It is within this convergence that I situate the tobacco plant, as its cultivation as a cash crop was shaped by racial-capitalist (Robinson, 2019) and settler-colonial (Wolfe, 2006) logics in the United States.

Following the arrival of European settlers, the sacred properties of the tobacco plant were disregarded, as it was commodified and overproduced for profit (Melilo, 2021). In the United States, slavery was central to this process, as the commodification and forced labor of enslaved Africans financed and thus strengthened the settler state (Wolfe, 2006). In the Virginia colony, the growing demand for tobacco fueled the settler-colonial project, displacing and eliminating Native societies and territories to access land for profit (Kulikoff, 2012). Settler colonialism, then, is not a singular event but rather an ongoing structural process that invades and violates to destroy, eliminate, and replace (Wolfe, 2006). Like the tobacco plant, I come to understand myself and my family, as entangled in this settler colonial project, where anti-black logics continue to operate alongside the systemic elimination and dispossession of Native and Indigenous peoples in the United States (King et al., 2020; Walcott, 2020; Wolfe, 2006).

Although Native people cultivated and harvested tobacco before the arrival of European settlers, most current knowledge about tobacco reflects dominant European narratives (Pego et

al., 1995). Despite its sacred role in Native societies, European settlers converted tobacco into an economic tool, justifying the displacement and death of Native and Black peoples through colonization and enslavement (Kerr-Ritchie, 1999; Pego et al., 1995). I situate my conceptual map in this tension, as tobacco's cultural history challenges me to examine it, not only as a site of aliveness, but also as a site of extreme violence. Its links to the origins of plantation and chattel slavery, and the forced removal of Native peoples from their ancestral lands, compel me to reflect on the ethical responsibilities inherent to the pursuit of aliveness (Quashie, 2021). I therefore use my conceptual metaphor to theorize how to contend with its legacy with care and reverence, for the plant itself, the land it was cultivated on, and the hands that harvested it.

Considered sacred amongst many Indigenous and Native groups in what we now call the Americas, the tobacco plant has long been used for prayers, offerings, and ceremonies, medicines, and as gifts to visitors or esteemed guests (Melilo, 2021; Sadik, 2014). In Amazonian societies in east-central Peru, where tobacco is believed to have originated, it is understood as a powerful protector and helper plant that guides, teaches, and heals (Jauregui et al., 2011; Narby & Pizuri, 2021). Known as *Mapacho*, tobacco is recognized as one of the *plantas con madre*, or plants with a mother, revered for its spirit, power, and presence (Jauregui et al., 2011; Narby & Pizuri, 2021). Through its sacred, medicinal, and entheogenic properties, tobacco is believed to bestow knowledge and wisdom to those who work with it with intention (Jauregui et al., 2011; Narby & Pizuri, 2021). As my conceptual model uses the tobacco plant as a metaphor, it was crucial to ground this framing in Indigenous knowledge and wisdom, situating tobacco beyond the violence of commodification and exploitation.

Often dismissed as a noxious weed by James I, the tobacco plant has often been misunderstood through the lens of white understandings (Kulikoff, 1979). To a novice or

outsider, it may appear insignificant, like a scrawny weed. Yet when properly cared for, tobacco is hardy and resilient (Kulikoff, 1979). In this way, it reminds me of the Black women in my family and the unique knowledge they hold. To the outside world, shaped by dominant epistemic standards, Black women's knowledge-making practices are often written off as insignificant (Collins, 1990). But like the tobacco plant, the women in my family stand tall and remain rooted in their aliveness (Baldwin, 2024; Quashie, 2021). Through this metaphor, I come to terms with the fact that even when our existence is not fully comprehensible to those who seek to exploit or disregard us, we continue to live, to breathe, to be.

This invisibility is not always negative; at times, it works in our favor as Black women. In fact, it is our rights to remain incomprehensible and unreduced by white hegemonic norms and knowledge standards (Glissant, 1997). As Glissant (1997) reminds us, this right to opacity is justified by the desire and need to escape from “any legitimacy anchored silently or resolutely in possession or conquest” (p. 189). From this perspective, the right to opacity helps us to reconsider the benefits and consequences of being intelligible and easily read to a world that can never fully understand us. It also offers Black women a measure of safety, providing a way to protect the sacredness and interiority of our worlds (Glissant, 1997).

I call on the tobacco plant again to illustrate this right to opacity. Its hypervisibility to European settlers in Virginia led to its mass production as a cash crop (Kulikoff, 1979). To meet this demand, land was cleared and burned to create fields for profit, and as tobacco was overproduced, the soil became exhausted, rendering both the land and sacred plant virtually useless to European settlers (Kulikoff, 1979). Given the exploitative and extractive nature of white supremacy (Robinson, 2019), I engage the right to opacity as a form of racial camouflage, protecting the sacred knowledge of the Black women in my family. In doing so, I aim to

safeguard the worlds that make our aliveness possible, moving in and out of opacity and legibility according to the forms of knowledge we choose to share with the academy.

The complex history and properties of the tobacco plant often remain opaque and illegible to those unfamiliar with its mystique (Bennet, 2012; Sadik, 2014; Pego et al., 1995). For my family members who are intimately familiar with the plant's inner workings and particularities, tobacco represents aliveness (Quashie, 2021). In my conceptual model, I use the tobacco plant metaphor to highlight how the Black women in my family have maintained their aliveness through creating and sharing knowledge through food and food-making. The metaphor also captures the aporetic challenge of navigating illegibility and legibility as Black women. This paradox required me to consider what my family and I seek to gain by making our cultural and knowledge-making practices intelligible to the outside world. What are the consequences of opacity? What are the benefits of remaining illegible? Through this conceptual model, I began working through these tensions, guided and inspired by the women in my family and the knowledge they shared with me.

On Tobacco...The Mother Plant

I extend my metaphor of the tobacco plant to think through Black mothering practices, drawing on its identity as one of the *plantas con madre*. As a mother plant, tobacco can self-pollinate with a single flower, yielding over a thousand seeds that can be produced in following seasons (Datiles & Acevedo- Rodríguez, 2014; Fisher & Gultinan, 1995; Pereira & Landau, 2022). The *Nicotiana* species can also self-sow, with new plants sprouting around the original mother plant (Datiles & Acevedo- Rodríguez, 2014). In this way, the tobacco plant represents care, resilience, and continuity. Similarly, the Black women in my family have leveraged their mothering practices to pass knowledge, care, and strategies for aliveness across generations. Like

the mother tobacco plant spreading seeds and sustaining life, Black mothers in my family work within care networks through their genealogic and kinship ties. Grandmothers, sisters, aunt, cousins, and at times, even neighbors are as part of a process referred to as mothering or othermothering (Collins, 1990; Troester, 1984). While these networks have historically formed in response to intersecting oppressions via race, class, and gender, they are reflective of how Black mothers cultivate knowledge of resilience and aliveness in their children. Much like the seeds of the mother tobacco plant that ensure aliveness is carried forward into the next generation, the women in my family achieve this goal through food and food-making practices.

At the same time, the mother tobacco plant also helps me think about the paradox of Black motherhood. Like a tobacco plant weathers its environment, Black mothers navigate racialized and gendered violence to foster aliveness in their children. In using this metaphor, I reflect on how the Black women in my family cultivate life and knowledge of aliveness across generations, passing on what is necessary for survival while holding on to the sacred, resilient worlds that make aliveness possible. In my family this is often expressed through preparing meals, preserving recipes, and sharing knowledge about what can nourish both the body and the spirit. Cooking and feeding become sites of aliveness as cultural memory, resilience, and survival skills are transmitted through the foods my family prepares. In this way, the women in my family collectively cultivate resilience, interdependence, and aliveness that reflect a commitment and dedication to aliveness within their communities (Baldwin, 2024; Joseph, 1981; 1984; Quashie, 2021).

On Tobacco...Meditations on Aliveness

Even as the tobacco plant is a fugitive of racial-capitalist and settler-colonial logics, it lives and breathes beyond commodity and conquest. It is a symbol of resistance. It is evidence of

the essence of aliveness as Quashie (2021) theorizes it. Despite extraction and commodification, the tobacco plant exists. And as Black women, so do we. In my conceptual model, I am interested in the knowledge-making practices that inform and sustain an ecology of aliveness (Baldwin, 2024, Quashie, 2021). Originally conceptualized through the experiences of Black, Caribbean women, ecologies of aliveness refer to the vibrant ecosystems of thought and practice created and sustained by Black women to address and alleviate the impact of our oppression (Baldwin, 2024).

Ecologies of aliveness are deeply rooted in the sociopolitical and environmental conditions of Black women, often materializing by intersecting forms of oppression, such as race and gender (Baldwin, 2024; Crenshaw, 1989). As such, ecologies of aliveness help to conceptualize how Black women engage in an ecosystem of thought and practice, rich with aliveness and possibility for Black women (Baldwin, 2024). I call on the Black women in my family to demonstrate what this might look like. For instance, in my family, knowledge is created and shared through food-making and storytelling practices created and shared intergenerationally. Through these practices, the women in my family tend to their physiological and spiritual needs, as well as the needs of those whom they care deeply about. In this way they sustain and maintain aliveness in a literal and metaphorical sense, as their foodways have supported and sustained our family for generations (Baldwin, 2024; Quashie, 2021). I offer my family's food and food-making practices as important sites where the ethos and episteme of aliveness shape and inform the ecosystems that maintain our being.

Decomposition of Conceptual Model

My conceptual model situates Black women's foodways within a larger climate of anti-blackness. Consistent with the perspectives of afropessimism, my conceptual model illustrates

anti-blackness as an atmospheric condition that maintains social death and anti-black violence (Patterson, 1982; Sharpe, 2016; Wilderson et al., 2017). Represented by white arrows in my conceptual model, social death is a theory of racial antagonisms fundamental to society's economic, libidinal, and social structure (Patterson, 1982). In color theory, the antithesis of black is white, highlighting not only a contrast but also the extreme value of lightness and darkness (Gilchrist, 2007). If white is the complete reflection of all visible light (Gilchrist, 2007), then in my conceptual model, the white arrows of social death reflect the totality of anti-black violence and suffering.

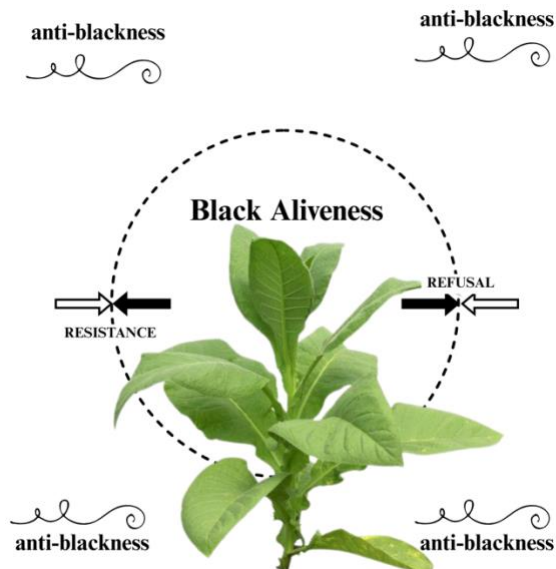
And yet, knowing there is no escape from anti-blackness, nor its totality, we continue to engage our humanity and defy the murder of selfhood through resistance and refusal (Bell, 1992). It is through this resistance and refusal that Black world-making, and thus aliveness, is made possible, as represented by the tobacco plant. I argue that through their adaptive knowledge-making network, the Black women in my family have maintained their foodways that have functioned as a force field in which Black aliveness is protected, nourished, and sustained (Quashie, 2021). The impact of this forcefield is represented by the black arrows in my conceptual model. Drawing again on color theory and the understanding that black is the absence of light (Gilchrist, 2007), this darkness symbolizes the ability to move in and out of obscurity for survival. In this way, the black arrows also represent that Black life and being are still possible in spite of anti-black violence and social death (Patterson, 1982).

In my conceptual model, Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021) is represented by the tobacco plant itself. The survival of tobacco plant further serves as an important metaphor for colonialism and the plantation economy of Virginia (Bennett, 2014). Exploitative and violent, Virginia's plantation economy was heavily driven by slavery and the mass production of tobacco (Kulikoff,

2012). It is through this colonial and racial capitalist project that the tobacco plant's history became intertwined with my ancestors and the Natives whose land they were forcibly brought to (Robinson, 2019). To further complicate this relationship, I note that the tobacco plant was also responsible for the region's highest level of Black land ownership during the Reconstruction Era, as Black sharecroppers used newly acquired land to cultivate tobacco to earn income (Bennet, 2014). Given the complex and close relationship, the tobacco plant shares with Black Virginians, I found this plant to be a powerful metaphor for my conceptual model.

When tending to the tobacco plant, growers care for the plant leaf by leaf, to ensure the best cultivation possible (Ortiz, 1995). As such, the individual leaves of the tobacco plant represent the individuals in my family. The leaves that have ripened are collected after topping and primming, representing the elders and key-knowledge holders in my family. It is important to note that this knowledge is adaptive, embodied, and contextually localized as the women in my family generate and transmit knowledge from generation to generation. Given the deep roots of the tobacco plant, the knowledge and wisdom of the Black women in my family runs deep and is communicated at a cellular and communal level. As tobacco leaves can often ripen at different times, so do the women in my extended kinship network. My conceptual model, therefore, emphasizes the importance of the collective, as knowledge is shared through food and food-making to maintain aliveness (Quashie, 2021). Below, I offer two diagrams, *Figure 1*, and *Figure 2*, that illustrate my conceptual model as described above.

Figure 1
Macro-View of Ecology of Aliveness



In *Figure 1*, I offer a macro-view of how I conceptualize Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021) in my study. The first and most central layer of *Figure 1* is a tobacco plant, which represents Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021). The next layer of *Figure 1* is a dotted circle that acts as a force field to protect the tobacco plant, and thus Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021). Again, this force field symbolizes the adaptive knowledge-making network of my extended kin. Even as the white arrows of social death actively try to breach the force field through anti-black violence, the black arrows illustrate a resistance to these anti-black conditions. In my study, I am concerned with the driving forces of this resistance, in the case of my family how my family's knowledge and food-making practices adapt and evolve to maintain aliveness (Quashie, 2021). Not pictured in my conceptual model are other atmospheric conditions, such as colonialism and white supremacy, which certainly are factors, but not specific to the scope of this study.

Figure 2
Micro-View of Ecology of Aliveness



In *Figure 2*, I offer a micro-view of how I conceptualize Black aliveness in my study. In this model, the deep root system of the tobacco plant is present, suggesting how knowledge is shared through multiple deep root systems all working to maintain Black aliveness. A closer look at the tobacco leaf at a cellular level is representative of two things, the individual family unit, as well as how energy, or knowledge, is generated or metabolized, to maintain Black aliveness. It is important to note here that family is not limited to biological family members, but rather kinship ties that share affiliation, functional ties, emotional support and economic responsibilities (Allen & James, 1998). Through adaptability and resistance, these family units work together to ensure the survival and development of aliveness (Quashie, 2021). In a plant cell, photosynthesis is the process plants use to metabolize light energy from the sun to produce chemical energy, glucose (Barnes, 1893). Glucose is then used to fuel the plant and release oxygen as a byproduct (Barnes, 1893). In my conceptual model I suggest that the plant cell, or the family unit, metabolizes energy, in this case knowledge, to maintain and sustain the foodways that then fuel Black aliveness. Given that family units are not bound by biological relation, this allows family units to grow and expand into communities. Like the spread of oxygen during photosynthesis, these

communities spread the knowing and doing of aliveness, through complex systems of communal and kinship relationships that allow aliveness to transcend time and space (Allen & James, 1998).

We Are the Ones We've Been Waiting For

Givens (2020) asserts that no destination or practice of escape has been permanent for Black people in the U.S. Givens (2020) further argues that the pursuit of educational freedom in the U.S. has yet to liberate Black people from suffering and oppression. Griffin and Turner (2021) build on the work of Givens (2020), suggesting that “while historically, Black people were legally barred from receiving an education, contemporary schooling systems feed Black students false neoliberal narratives with the intention of quelling resistance, progress, imagination, and liberation” (p. 441). Based on this understanding, it is not surprise then that U.S. schools uphold white epistemic beliefs and knowledge claims while “silencing, erasing, and banning Black history, culture, and knowledge from schools” (Griffin & Turner, 2021, p. 441).

Dumas (2014) contends that “for many black children and families in the United States, Britain and elsewhere, schooling is a site of suffering” (p. 2). Dumas (2014) argues that this suffering “converges with, and only exacerbates a broader *racial melancholia*, that heavy deeply-felt awareness of the history and persistence of anti-black disregard and subjugation” (p. 3). Young et al. (2018) further argue that the remnants of slavery are evident within schooling systems that “dehumanize Black students’ bodies, cultural knowledge, and intellect” (p. 103). It is imperative therefore, that we do not separate school systems from the violence they enact on Black women and girls in the afterlife of slavery (Hartman, 1997). In schools, Black girls often experience racialized and gendered forms of violence that aim to dispose them of their intellectual currency and inquiry (Young et al., 2018). Persistent societal images and dominant

narratives that portray Black women and girls negatively, further contribute to the dehumanization of Black girls (Young et al., 2018).

In schools, Black girls are labeled as aggressive, defiant, and sexually deviant, consistent with Jezebel and Sapphire tropes that began during enslavement (Collins, 1986; hooks, 1982; Young et al., 2018). As such, these negative stereotypes are often used to justify epistemic and other forms of violence against Black girls in schools, resulting in a general lack of care and protection (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016; Young et al., 2018; Winn, 2011). And yet, we are still taught to view schools and academic success as a means for achieving self-efficacy and social nobility (Chavous, T., & Cogburn, 2007; Patton et al., 2016).

For centuries, Black women and girls have been taught that social and academic success impact their overall well-being and cannot be achieved without education (Price-Dennis & Muhammad, 2021). At the same time, contemporary literacy educators and scholars, in particular (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Muhammad & Haddix, 2016; Toliver, 2021; Winn, 2011), have made significant contributions in theorizing how literacy and the literary traditions of Black women and girls can be used to combat racialized and gendered violence. And while I agree that literacy and literary traditions among Black women and girls are important for fostering academic success, identity development, sociopolitical consciousness, and the joy of Black girls (Price-Dennis & Muhammad, 2021), I believe that it is also critical to highlight the ways Black women have achieved this beyond and in spite of traditional schooling contexts.

For instance, for my mother and grandmother, whose highest level of education is secondary school, are rich sources of lived experiences and expertise that are often disregarded and dismissed by the academy (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2000). And yet, through food-making and storytelling, they were able to instill in me knowledge that has guided me as a Black girl, and

now a Black woman. Their kitchens have fed me, reminded me of who I am—of *whose I am*. Their stories have kept me going in the darkest times, always lighting my path forward. Their sacrifices have allowed me to achieve my wildest dreams—*their wildest dreams*. This is the knowledge that matters to me. This is the knowledge that matters to us.

As schools continue to function as sites of violence (Dumas, 2014), that effectively murder the spirit of Black students (Love, 2019; Williams, 1987), I offer one way that we might protect the potential of Black students by healing and mitigating harm as a community. Engaging Black women's foodways, this study aims to highlight one way that we might continue to create and share Black epistemic knowledge, outside of the school walls that continually subject us to violence. I argue that this knowledge is rooted in resistance and refusal, necessary to sustain our aliveness (Quashie, 2021). In doing so, my study serves as one way that we might engage Black women and girls in the full spectrum of their being and knowing, highlighting the ways our vast knowledge-making practices often expand beyond traditional school and begin with our families.

Vargas et al. (2025) suggest that “school children do not start from zero when learning about food in school. They bring with them years of experiences with food, beliefs, and preferences...all of which shape what children, feel, know, and do in their daily lives” (p. 3). Food, therefore, has the power to capitalize on the experiences and knowledge of students (Vargas et al., 2025). Further, engaging food critically in educational contexts has the power to teach students to “recognize prevailing social food norms, behaviours, and power dynamics in their own spheres of action” (p. 3). Given that “food is a barometer through which we can measure the failures of the U.S. as a nation state that has long profited from the land and free labor of Indigenous and Black people” (Reese & Cooper, 2021, p. 451), the incorporation of

foodways in education and educational research can prove to be beneficial tool for interrogating systems and structures of oppression.

Navarro (2022) asserts that through food, “black people have constructed their own conceptions of time, by imaging a future for themselves that has been denied materially and ideologically” (p. 212). Engaging foodways, therefore, offers Black students with frameworks and tools to not only support aliveness through food, but also to create and dream of new imaginaries in which aliveness is made possible (Quashie, 2021; Navarro, 2022). Engaging “life-making practices within death-producing spaces” (p. 202), Black women’s foodways, and the knowledge-making practices that inform them, invite Black students to engage experiences, foods, and voices, that produce hope, vitality, and aliveness (Quashie, 2021; Navarro, 2022).

Synthesis of Theoretical Framing

I use my conceptual model and theoretical framework to guide my study and justify the necessity of centering the experiences and knowledge of Black women and girls. Through the foodways of Black women, I highlight the cultural and knowledge-making practices of Black woman that sustain aliveness (Quashie, 2021). As such, I offer a framework for how we might conduct educational research that offers a meditation on the aliveness of Black folks. In the context of my family, our knowledge-making practices often engage food and are created in community with other Black women and girls. Therefore, I make the conscious decision to expand the context of knowledge-making outside the confines of traditional schooling to offer a rich understanding of the epistemic beliefs and practices of Black women in the sociohistorical context it was created in.

In the following quote, Dillard (2000) offers a metaphor comparing research to a recipe: “the relationship between the research (as ‘knower’) and the researched (as ‘known’ or to be

known) is one of detachment: The researcher is set apart from the subject (the recipe) so that knowledge (the outcome) is ‘objective’” (p. 4). As educational research is traditionally rooted in positivist paradigms and truths found to be objective and backed by scientific methods (Dillard, 2000), I question how transformative educational research can truly be if we continue to do research with the master’s tools (Lorde, 1979).

In other words, if our research frameworks, theories, and methods are not transformed at an epistemological and methodological level, there is little hope for educational research that transforms our communities and the community we serve (Dillard, 2000). My study, therefore, engages “research as a responsibility” (Dillard, 2000, p. 5) and as a duty to the Black women in my family who have guided me and my study. In doing so, I propose an alternative way of doing educational research, rooted in the epistemological and methodological practices of Black women.

In the case of my family, I argue that this unique and specialized knowledge has nourished and sustained us through multiple generations in our family and has been necessary to maintain our aliveness (Baldwin, 2024; Griffin & Turner, 2021; Quashie, 2021). I aim to redefine who is worthy of holding and creating knowledge. Moreover, I aim to highlight how we might do educational research in a way that engages our standpoint as Black women, and the particular knowledge it affords us (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2000).

Every day, Black women are sources that gather and collect data and evidence that has the power to amplify the voices and experiences of Black women and girls (Collins, 2000; Phillips, 2006; Sheared, 1994). Therefore, I reject traditional research frameworks and methods rooted in white epistemic beliefs and instead uplift the epistemologies of Black women (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2000) that have sustained me. Given that all knowledge is grounded in a social,

political, economic, and historical context (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002), educational research should continue to make space for the multiple ways that knowledge can be created and shared, even outside of the traditional research paradigms.

Using interpretative frameworks rooted in our unique social, cultural, and historical experiences, Black women have formed their own integral knowledge systems in community with other Black women (Collins, 2000; Phillips, 2006). This epistemological stance, therefore, demands the acknowledgement of the knowledge-making practices and standpoint of Black women, and the ways that Black women researchers are intimately familiar with the experiences of other Black women. As such, in choosing the methods for my study, I was intentional about choosing methodological frameworks and tools that help conduct research that is personal, deeply intimate, and rooted in the epistemic beliefs and practices of Black women. In the next, chapter, I further detail the research methods and methodology that guide my study.

A Meditation on Methods...

The research methods that the academy has taught me often conflict with the ways of knowing that I learned from the Black women in my family. The knowledge-making practices of these women are not easily accessed through peer-reviewed journals or informational texts. A deep understanding of my family's intimate knowledge-making practices can only be earned by engaging in communion and showing up for one another in both times of need and celebration.

Seemingly ordinary family events and gatherings, such as birthday parties, cookouts, family reunions, and holiday dinners, serve as a methodological training ground. Our family's knowledge-making practices can be highlighted through conversations around the dining room table and time spent together in the kitchen. It is through this process that I earned the privilege to bear witness to the powerful stories and food-making practices of the women in my family. And it is through this worth witnessing (Winn & Ubiles, 2011) that our family's knowledge, food-making practices, and stories are shared from generation to generation.

For some of the women in my family, the sharing of their food-making practices and stories is a source of healing and inspiration. For others, their food-making practices and stories are told through tension, trauma, and at times, unresolved feelings. Our family's cultural and epistemological practices are thereby rooted in the full spectrum of our self-ordained and self-proclaimed humanity. Our methods remind us to *forgive* but to never *forget*. Our methods allow us grace as we do what we must to stay alive.

Like our knowledge-making practices, we are both-and...here-there. We are flawed, imperfect, and messy, yet still worthy of love and protection. The Black women in my family, therefore, require a methodological framework that lives and breathes like the tomatoes in our gardens. Our methods are as tangled and coily as our hair, but easy to tame if we take the time to

sit and gently tease it out. Our methods are as loud as we are when we all get together. But most importantly, our methods are deep and expansive, and firmly rooted in our homeplace and our first kitchen on Josephine Street.

A closer look through the kitchen at Josephine Street might remind you that ordinary objects found in the kitchen are conduits, connecting us to the recipes and stories associated with them. Ordinary kitchen objects serve as cultural artifacts and containers of my family's stories (Liu & Sunstein, 2016; Liu, 2013). Through these kitchen objects and cultural artifacts, my family's stories come to life, inviting the women and me to witness and make sense of the knowledge and memories they offer to us (Liu & Sunstein, 2016).

Take the mason jars on top of the kitchen cabinets, for example. Although they look empty, they are full of memories of my Grandma, Queenie, learning to can tomatoes and green beans with her Aunt Mazie. The empty family-size County Crock margarine container now contains *beans and weenies*, but it used to be filled with Grandma Thelma's applesauce made from the overripe apples she would find while laboring in the apple orchard. The cast iron skillets in the broiler drawer have been cared for and seasoned by multiple generations of Paige women, coated with oil and preserved like our family recipes and stories.

If you were to walk through the kitchen on Josephine Street, you would find our family's most cherished memories, stories, and recipes frozen in time. If you listen carefully, you might still hear the fights, laughter, and tears that once filled Josephine's kitchen. If you look by the side door, you might see a wooden chair and imagine Aunt Alice still sitting there, just as her mother used to, making sure the kids are not running in and out of the house. You might run your fingers over the dining room table, covered by two table covers, one cloth and one plastic, and feel crumbs leftover from a lemon pound cake.

Josephine is the birthplace of our known lineage and the first kitchen. Our food-making practices, and the family stories that they are informed and shaped by, share an ancestral connection to the first kitchen on Josephine Street. Josephine is also the training ground where the women in my family developed their expertise and received vetting as knowledgeable, trustworthy, makers of food, through time spent cooking with our elders. As such, Josephine serves as a foundational locale for this study. Although it is no longer the physical gathering place for my family, Josephine Street, is the epistemic epicenter for the Black women in family and the main server for the network of knowledge that sustains our aliveness (Quashie, 2021).

In this study, food-making and family stories highlight the ordinary, everyday, knowledge-making practices of the women in my family (Williams-Forson, 2006). I position the women in my family as expert knowers and doers of aliveness (Griffin & Turner, 2021; Quashie, 2021) evidenced by cultural and knowledge-making practices relevant to Black womanist foodways. Through Black womanist foodways, the women in my family offer valuable insight into the epistemic beliefs and practices that support and sustain their being. I uplift their expertise and knowledge as legitimate and valuable, even when these forms of knowledge are undervalued and undertheorized in the academy (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2000).

Methods and Methodology

This study is a critical ethnographic examination of the intergenerational food and knowledge-making practices created and shared within a single extended family. I employ critical ethnography to ground Black women's epistemologies in a gendered and racialized context that engages food and family (Madison, 2005; Palmer & Caldas, 2015). I expand on applications and conduct of educational research that is humanizing, while also centering the experiences and stories of Black women. Within this methodological framework, I rely on

critical race counter-storytelling (Solórzano, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) to challenge dominant narratives that devalue and marginalize Black women's knowledge-making practices. In doing so, I ground Black women's epistemic beliefs and practices in a specific gendered and racialized context that engages food, family, and storytelling.

I highlight the unique context in which the Black women in my family create and share knowledge intergenerationally through Black womanist foodways that maintain and sustain aliveness (Quashie, 2021). I argue that through food-making and storytelling, the women in my family offer an epistemological framework for the pursuit of Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021), necessary for being, and navigating a world that is presupposed on our death and destruction (Griffin & Turner, 2021 Jordan, 2016; Quashie, 2021). I ask the following questions as I seek to understand that relationship between the Black women in my family and the cultural practices and knowledge that informs their foodways.

Research Question(s)

- 1) What intergenerational knowledge do the Black women in my family share, and what new knowledge do they create, through food and food-making?
- 2) What do the stories they tell and uncover through their foods and food-making practices illuminate about Black aliveness?

Research Significance

To underscore the urgency of this study, as well as the importance of the methods I choose to employ, I reflect on the sociohistorical context in which Black women and girls in the U.S. have been required to navigate racism and sexism simultaneously (Crenshaw, 1989). I argue that not only do our stories serve as a tool for producing knowledge, but they can also be a means of sharing our experiences and affirming our humanity as we navigate and resist intersecting

forms of oppression (Marshall, 2001; Rowe, 2022; Walker, 1983). I offer my family's food stories as one example of how counter-storytelling can be shaped by the experiences and subjectivities of Black women, and thus our epistemic beliefs and values (Barnes, 2006; Bylund, 2003; Smith, 2020; Thomas, 2020).

In her foundational text, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, hooks (1981) asserts that Black women have historically had their identity socialized out of existence. Due to the social and structural positioning of Black women and girls at the bottom of U.S. society, hooks (1981) argues that we are rarely recognized “as a group separate and distinct from black men, or a present part of the larger group ‘women’ in this culture” (p. 7). hooks (1981) further suggests that the devaluation and marginalization of Black womanhood and girlhood are a direct result of the sexual exploitation of Black women during slavery.

As the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade gained momentum, enslaved African women made up one-third of the human cargo aboard most slave ships (hooks, 1981). Aboard the ships of their captors, the displaced Black women were often subject to rape and other forms of violence used to dehumanize and terrorize the enslaved. Rape was so common on slave ships that many enslaved women arrived on the shores of the U.S. forcibly impregnated by their tormentors. Upon being auctioned off and sold, Black women were further exploited and subjected to unimaginable violence (hooks, 1981).

As Black women and girls were forced to labor in the fields and serve in the domestic household, they were continuously subjected to sexual exploitation and violence, often seen as objects of white male sexual assault. Enslaved Black girls were commonly assaulted between the ages of 13 and 16. Black women and girls were also subjected to “breeding” (p. 39), another form of sexual exploitation and violence in which they were treated as livestock and forced to

produce children that would be ripped away and sold into a life of enslavement (hooks, 1981). Violence perpetrated against Black women and girls was a common and deliberate effort to control the enslaved population and maintain white dominance (hooks, 1981).

Enslaved Black women and girls were also expected to perform gendered duties such as housekeeping, cooking, and childrearing, while enduring hardship, pain, and violence at the hands of their enslavers, and at times even Black men. Deeply ingrained into the social and structural foundations of the U.S., Black women and girls remain subjected to the remnants of this violence even centuries after the abolishment of slavery (hooks, 1981). As previously stated in chapter three, the violence experienced by Black women and girls during enslavement and its afterlife (Hartman & Sexton, 1997) is directly connected to the violence experienced by Black girls in schools (Young et al., 2018).

Morris (2016) argues that racist and misogynistic views of Black girls in schools lead to “beliefs, policies, and actions that degrade and marginalize both their learning and humanity” (p. 8). The criminalization of Black girls in schools leads to epistemic, emotional, and physical harm, contributing to conditions that push Black girls out of schools, making them vulnerable to other forms of harm, such as poverty and violence (Morris, 2016). And yet, as we have and continue to experience racialized and gendered violence, I am reminded that *there’s a bright side somewhere and I ain’t gonna rest now ‘til I find it* (Cleveland, 1970).

Black women have used their stories and narratives to advance the cause of abolition and liberation by highlighting the effects of racism and sexism (Mitchell, 2002). Mitchell (2002) argues that the focus of early narratives was rooted in the narration of our movement from bondage to freedom. Some narratives, such as the emancipatory narrative, focus on “the protagonist’s conception and articulation of herself as a free, autonomous, and self-authorized

self” (p. 4). Based on this understanding, as a Black woman scholar and educator, I am largely concerned with narratives of aliveness (Quashie, 2021) that have the power to illuminate our being and humanity in educational contexts and beyond.

Through narratives of aliveness, I situate my study within an epistemological stance rooted in aliveness. One that refuses the dominant narratives of Black women and girls that seek to dispossess us of our humanity and being (Griffin & Turner, 2021; Quashie, 2021). Dillard (2000) suggests that the narratives of Black women are situated in a unique cultural context that encompasses specialized knowledges that shape our unique epistemologies. While I understand these forms of knowledge to be legitimate and powerful, they have often been excluded and dismissed in the academy (Dillard, 2000). As a result, understandings of Black women and how they produce knowledge have taken up space in alternative sites like music, poetry, literature, and in my family’s case—the kitchen (Dillard, 2000).

For most Black women, experiential knowledge is critical to “making sense” (p. 23) of our community and the world in which we live (Dillard, 2000). It makes sense that for many Black women scholars and educators we invoke our own lived experiences and those of the women we are in community with to guide how and why we do research (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2000). Like other Black women scholars, I understand the angst of navigating formal academic training that decontextualizes the raced, gendered, classed, and sexualized lives in which we live. We are often asked to abandon our ways of knowing in favor of the ways of the academy to produce “legitimate” scholarship (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2000).

This tension causes conflict between how I view the function of education and how I view myself as a knower. Palmer (2003) suggests, “education portrays the self as a knower, the world as known, and mediates the relation of the two, giving the knowing self-supremacy over

the known world” (p. 58). Palmer (2003) further suggests that our epistemological practices therefore shape our knowledge, and that knowledge shapes our living. In the context of my study, I argue that through my family, the stories they share, and the food they make, that I have come to understand myself as a knower. This is also the context in which I have come to know the world.

As a Black woman, this is the knowledge that matters most to me. This is the knowledge that shapes and guides who I am as a researcher, and the topics that I am most interested in. And yet, understanding that education is an applied field, concerned with epistemic and ontological practices that can be used to teach and transform social conditions and realities, this knowledge has been largely undervalued (Dillard, 2000). Stated otherwise by Moten and Harney (2013), “it’s fucked up for you, in the same way that we’ve already recognized that it’s fucked up for us” (p. 10). Therefore, from a womanist perspective (Phillips, 2006; Walker, 1983), I argue that the field of education ought to do a better job of amplifying the voices of Black women and Black feminist thinking to make space for methods and frameworks of aliveness that sustain our humanity and the being of all living kind (Collins, 1990; Phillips, 2006; Quashie, 2021).

I argue that engaging the stories of Black women is one way to incorporate their unique standpoint and knowledge-making practices in the field of education (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2000; Rowe, 2022). This engagement is important because, in the context of teaching and conducting educational research, this knowledge might afford us the language to support Black women and girls in deciphering and theorizing their gendered and racialized experiences on their own terms (Palmer, 2003). In doing so, I offer Black feminist epistemologies as a means to understand our knowledge-making practices, and thus our everyday living, as Black women and girls (Palmer, 2013).

Black women's stories are urgent, and we must tell them for ourselves since only we have experienced what it is like to be Black women (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2000). Byng-Hall and Thomas (1990) further suggest that through stories we learn to pass information to one another. Storytelling, therefore, can serve as a critical tool for understanding the subjectivities of Black women and girls as it relates to the production of knowledge (Rowe, 2022). For many Black women, storytelling serves an important role in knowledge and world-making and affirms one's dignity and personhood (Barnes, 2006; Rowe, 2022; Smith, 2020; Thomas, 2020).

As such, storytelling in an educational context has the power to honor the knowingness of Black women and girls as both students and scholars (Liu et al., in press). Further, storytelling also implicates how Black women educators and researchers come to know themselves and the world around them, impacting how we research and teach (Liu et al., in press). Situating my study in this context is important because it gives me the authority to highlight the knowledge-making practices of the Black women in my family as told through food-making and storytelling. As families are often the first story-sharing arena for people of color, I found that by studying my own family, I could gain a close, intimate look into how Black women pass knowledge, in my case, through Black womanist foodways (Smith, 2020).

Critical Ethnography

Critical ethnography (Madison, 2005) is a qualitative approach that "explicitly sets out to critique hegemony, oppression, and asymmetrical power relations in order to foster social change" (Palmer & Caldas, 2017, p. 381). Central to critical ethnography is the assertion that "knowledge is constructed and interpreted from the vantage point of the people whose voices are marginalized" (Palmer & Caldas, 2017, p. 384). As such, critical ethnography supports me in

engaging methodological tools that highlight the knowledge and lived experiences of the Black women in my family.

Based on this understanding, critical ethnography gives me the authority to engage “theory in the flesh” (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981, p. 23), using methods tailored to the beliefs, experiences, and values of the Black women in my family who shape my study. The literature supports that family stories are most likely to be told during family events and gatherings (Blum-Kulka, 1991; Blum-Kulka & Snow, 1992; Ochs & Taylor, 1992). In my family, our stories are largely told in contexts that engage food and food making. From a critical ethnographic perspective, my family’s stories and cultural artifacts such as food, kitchen utensils, photos, and recipes are rich sources of data that reflect the knowledge and cultural practices of the Black women in my family and the sociohistorical context they are situated in (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012).

This methodological approach is beneficial for holistically capturing the epistemological beliefs and values of the women in my family. By collecting data through participant observation, intimate conversations, and cultural artifacts, I aim to analyze the experiences and narratives of the women in my family to provide a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973, p. 382) of data through the lens of my theoretical framework. Specifically, I aim to find evidence of how the women in my family create and share knowledge of aliveness as they engage Black womanist foodways. This process involves going deep into the cultural context, meanings, and social behavior of the women in my family to deeply analyze the complex cultural systems and “webs of significance” (p. 5) that impact and shape how the women create and share knowledge (Geertz, 1973).

Critical ethnography further empowers me to use my insider knowledge and subjective knowledge to navigate data collection and analysis (Madison, 2005; Palmer & Caldas, 2017; Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2017). In practice, this looks like reading the body language of my family members to navigate conversations, as we discuss food and family stories that are deeply personal and sensitive. It also looks like identifying key informants, whose knowledge guided me through the recruitment process of this study and helped me identify other family members who were knowledgeable about our family's stories and food-making practices. Through the critical ethnographic methods outlined in this section, I proposed what it might look like to intertwine theory and method to highlight the knowledge-making practices of the Black women in my family.

Given my close proximity to the women in my study, I found literature relevant to autoethnography helpful in guiding how I conduct and navigate intimate research reflexively, as a family member and researcher. In turning my research lens inward, I was able to deeply connect with the women in my family, using our shared experiences and relationships to capture the dynamic nature of our knowledge and cultural practices. I found that through this reflexivity, I was able to leverage my personal experiences and relationships to offer a comprehensive analysis of my family, with care and commitment, not always captured through experiment, interview, survey, or even traditional ethnographic research (Adams & Manning, 2015). In doing so, I was able to capture and analyze the nuanced ways my family members think, act, and navigate an ecology of aliveness (Baldwin, 2024) as told through family stories and anecdotes relevant to food.

Critical Race Counter-Storytelling

Delgado (1989) argues that members of marginalized groups can use counter-stories as a means of self-preservation in the face of oppression and subordination. Counter-stories, then, offer new possibilities and imaginations that challenge the validity of dominant narratives while building consensus and a common culture of shared experiences among racially marginalized groups (Delgado, 1989). In my study, I engage critical race counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) from a critical ethnographic lens to examine how the women in my family engage in storytelling to create and share knowledge in relationship with one another.

Counter-storytelling is a method of telling the stories of those at the margins of society (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). As storytelling is a rich tradition and an essential tool for survival and liberation in the Black community (Bell, 1987, 1992, 1996; Delgado, 1985, 1995, 1996), I engage the food and family stories of the Black women in my family as one form of counter-storytelling. I use composite stories to situate the women in my family within rich knowledge-making practices that are created and shared through Black womanist foodways that sustain aliveness (Quashie, 2021). Composite stories draw on a variety of biographical and autobiographical data to describe the “racialized, sexualized, and classed experiences of people of color” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 33).

To earn and recollect the composite stories of the women in my family, I draw on Bernal’s (1998) notion of *cultural intuition* to situate my experiences and the experiences of the Black women in my family through “collective experience and community” memory (p. 563). Cultural intuition engages the unique epistemologies of People of Color by drawing on “personal experience, collective experience, professional experience, communal memory, existing literature, and the research process itself” (Bernal, 2016, p. 1). Cultural intuition is a valuable methodological tool because it provides a framework for engaging the knowledge and social

realities of the Black women in my family throughout all steps of the research process (Bernal, 2016). In this study, I engage cultural intuition as a means to further legitimize the unique ways of knowing of Black women as I collect and analyze data.

Engaging counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) through the lens of critical ethnography offers a methodological framework for how I engage in this work as a worthy witness (Winn & Ubiles, 2011). In analyzing the counter-stories of the Black women in my family, I am required to find a balance between my subjective and objective self, using my inner feelings and beliefs to guide me through the research process (Madison, 2005; Palmer & Caldas, 2017; Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2017). In the context of this study, this is especially important as I engage the women in my family as family members first, and research participants second. Doing so supports me in affirming the agency and humanity of the women in my family, as they share their deeply personal stories and food-making practices in intimate settings. My study, therefore, rejects methods rooted in data neutrality and detachment between the researcher and those researched (Madison, 2005; Palmer & Caldas, 2017; Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012).

Food as Medium for Counter-Storytelling.

I turn to food studies to strengthen my analysis of my family's food-making practices and the counter-stories that accompany them. I found that my study closely aligned with the methodological approaches commonly used in this field. Through food, the women in my family illuminate their epistemic values and beliefs, offering insight into how they construct meaning about themselves and the world around them (Passidomo, 2013). By engaging the discipline of food studies, I was able to draw connections between food-making, cultural artifacts, and family in the construction and sharing of knowledge (Passidomo, 2013).

Ferris (2014) asserts that “in food lies the harsh dynamics of racism, sexism, class, struggle, and ecological exploitation that has long defined the South; yet there too, resides a family, a strong connection to place, conviviality, and flavor” (p. 1). Black women’s relationship to food has allowed them to define themselves and create spaces of creativity and revelation that support their being (Williams-Forson, 2006). Bobo (2001) suggests that “food is an ideal medium for examining the confluence of social relations, where the values, traditions, mores, and enduring historical linkages of black life are cultivated and preserved” (p. 18). Common foods such as chicken, rice, noodles, beans, eggs, and bread typify how many Black women have continually expressed themselves (Williams-Forson, 2006).

Williams-Forson (2006) suggests that “food has the capacity to ‘break things down’ to a level where most people can understand and connect with it” (p. 224). In this way, recipes and food-making have the power to teach lessons that extend beyond their culinary context (Thorsson, 2015). For instance, although recipes are followed through linear time, they often demand improvisation (Thorsson, 2015). This was the case for my mother who learned to cook green beans with ham hock. Today, she uses smoked turkey as a substitute in the recipe because smoked turkey is a more accessible, and slightly healthier alternative.

As a result of improvisation, my mom taught my sister and me how to be mindful of our health, while still maintaining a close connection to our family’s culinary roots. This was an especially important lesson given the common health problems that are prevalent in my family and other Black families, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and breast cancer (Black Women’s Health Study, 2024, 2025). This is also an example of how “recipes are never finished” (Tompkins, 2013, p. 440). Although recipes are prepared linearly, they can change and adapt, as do the women in my family (Thorsson, 2025; Tompkins, 2013). As such, I sought methods that

could capture the rich food-making practices and counter-stories of the women in my family and contextualize their bodies of knowledge.

This is important because Black women often use their kitchens to feed their families and loved ones, while also engaging in cultural transmission and knowledge-making (Williams-Forson, 2006). Kitchens, for example, often serve as the main setting for *food events* (Williams-Forson, 2006), offering cultural snapshots that engage Black women in social, cultural, economic, political, and gendered contexts. Based on this understanding, I situate the kitchens of the Black women in my family as foundational methodological training grounds and the main setting for collecting and analyzing in my study.

I aim to position Black women as our own archives and repositories of knowledge and culture (Williams-Forson, 2006). Liu and Sunstein (2016) maintain that “some stories are best conveyed and performed orally (Bauman 1992; Lord, 2000); some stories do not *want* to be in written form” (p. 62). In the context of my study, I engage food as the medium for my family’s counter-stories, highlighting recipes and food-making practices that shape my family’s epistemological and methodological orientation.

Positionality

I enter this space with the Black women who have come before me, offering the fruit of our labor. I situate my family’s knowledge-making practices in relationship with the family stories and foods that have kept them alive for over four generations. My family’s recipes and the stories that accompany them have survived and endured enslavement and its aftermath, situating the creation and sharing of knowledge intergenerationally. I answer the call gifted to me by my ancestors and elders by sharing my family’s stories, cultural foods, and the knowledge-making practices they are shaped by.

I also enter this space as a Black woman in the academy whose story has not yet been told—at least not in this way. As a Black woman and a member of the Paige family, I am situated within and yet positioned against my family, our knowledge practices, recipes, and stories. I am an *insider-other* (Collins, 1990), a daughter, granddaughter, and niece, yet also a researcher who will present this study in spaces that the women in my family were not afforded access to. I am taught to sit at the dining room table to do my homework, while disregarding the knowledge that has already been cultivated there by the women in my family. I am taught to trust the wisdom of my mother, aunts, and grandmothers, but not more than the peer-reviewed literature of my field. I am asked how this study speaks to the field of education, but the women who raised me have taught me more in their kitchens than any teacher ever has in their classrooms.

Carefully and ethically navigating my position as an insider-other (Collins, 1990) requires me to keep an *intimate distance* (Bigenho, 2017) between myself and my family members, with whom I am conducting research on. To achieve this, I suspend all that I thought I knew about the women in my family to make space for them to share how they want to be known in the context of this study. This process required spending time with the women in my family, knowing there is nothing that I can compensate them with that is better than seeing me walk across the stage as Dr. Cambria Myelle Conley.

And yet, I understand that this is the task that I was charged with. This is the story, this is our story, and I was born to tell it. So, I enter this space as a storyteller and a rememberer. I enter this space as the second-great-granddaughter of Marie and the great-granddaughter of Thelma. I enter this space as the granddaughter of Queenie and the daughter of Tina. I bring with me the knowledge-making practices that have kept us, over and over again. With hopes that this study

will help other Black women uncover the food, the knowledge, and the stories that might help keep them too.

I rely heavily on critical ethnographic methods to justify and support my research process as I navigate my position as both as a researcher and family member. This unique positioning affords me the ability to provide an “insider account” (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 356) of my family’s food-making practices and stories. At the same time, this positioning allows me to maintain an intimate distance that allows me to describe my family’s experiences from a vantage point that illuminates experiences and stories that may be difficult for my family members to assess, as it relates to my research question (Adams & Manning, 2015).

For example, my grandmother who has never engaged with the work of Quashie (2021), might not be able to articulate Black aliveness using the same academic jargon and theoretical framing as I do. However, through the food-making practices and family stories my grandmother shares, I can deeply analyze the information she shares with me to bridge the gaps between my family’s methods and those of the academy to address my research questions. Gavin et al. (2012) argue that family members often have a shared history and understanding that is rooted in a commitment to one another. As such, as a member of the family, my positioning offers the language to describe our experiences in a nuanced way that captures the richness of our knowledge-making practices (Adams & Manning, 2015).

Intimacy as a Method

Cîrstea and Pescinski (2024) argue that “focusing on intimacy can help build more equitable research practices by prioritizing ongoing, reflexive, and caring consideration of our relationships with participants” (p. 2). Doing so requires researchers to build “longstanding relationships with participants, through living and working with them over time in a way that

builds trust” (Cîrstea and Pescinski, 2024). This process relies heavily on physical and subjective proximity and relational commitment for both the researcher and the participants (Cîrstea and Pescinski, 2024). Because intimacy is grounded in positionality, who I show up as a researcher and how my family members view and relate to me, greatly impacted how intimacy functioned as a methodological tool in my study (Cîrstea and Pescinski, 2024).

The process of engaging intimacy as a method supported me in unsettling power dynamics as I conducted research as a researcher and a family member, leading to many methodological and epistemological lessons as I conducted research with my family. For example, as I prepared for what I thought would be a recorded interview with my grandma, the data collection event completely changed forms—of course, at the direction of *Queenie*. Because Queenie’s hair *wasn’t done*, she did not want to be recorded for our interview. Yes, this even meant audio recording. *Just write it down*, she said. Based on the direction of Queenie, I planned to type her responses to my interview questions. As I typed Queenie’s responses, she asked me to read everything back to her, modifying words and adding things she forgot. As her nickname implies, I knew better than to disobey her, so I followed her lead. I let the conversation flow, abandoning the interview questions I originally prepared. As Queenie kept editing her responses to me, what was originally planned as an interview ended up becoming an intimate conversation that resulted in Queenie and I co-writing a composite story of her food-making and family stories.

This process required me to negotiate through vulnerability and tensions between myself as a researcher and as Queenie’s granddaughter. I learned to forefront my ethical responsibility and commitment to care for the women in my family. From a methodological perspective, centering intimacy and care when speaking with Queenie helped guide my research practice,

especially when securing informed and continuous consent (Cîrstea and Pescinski, 2024). In securing ongoing consent, I was able to share Queenie's experiences and stories on her own terms. From this experience, Queenie indirectly taught me to challenge my rigid methodological training, resulting in my abandoning interviews altogether in favor of more intimate conversations led by the women in my family.

Research Context

Josephine City was created as a place of refuge for Black families during the terror of white supremacy in the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras of post-Civil War Virginia. Founded by 24 freedmen, including Josephine Williams, from whom the town received its name, Josephine is a testament to the resilience of Black families (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2015). Josephine's establishment reflects the thinking of the times, as articulated by Frederick Douglass (1870) in his newly published newspaper, *The New National Era*. Asserting that "no people can flourish who are without a home," Douglass advises newly emancipated Black folks to utilize their agricultural roots to establish themselves in the country where they will not have to "encounter the keen edge of popular prejudice" (p. 2). As such, Josephine City offered its Black residents a place that would sustain their being through self-reliance, a shared sense of community, and mutual aid.

The small town offered dwellings that supported community gardening and farming, as well as a church, gas station, grocery store, multiple schools, and a proper burial ground for its Black residents (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2015). There was a hat shop that also sold clothing, a slaughterhouse where you could purchase meat, a barbershop, multiple eateries, and a clubhouse. By the time of the 1920 census, Josephine City would become a stronghold and home for many Black families, lasting throughout the 20th century, surviving constant threat and

change marked by integration and the annexation of Josephine City by the city of Berryville in 1989. Today, what remains of Josephine City is a two-lane, three-mile-long, paved road called Josephine Street. Preserved on Josephine Street are 30 dwellings that have survived the 19th and 20th centuries, the Milton Valley Cemetery, Zion Baptist Church, the Benjamin Franklin Annex, the Josephine School Community Museum, and the Johnson-Williams Community Apartments (formerly Johnson-Williams High School) (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2015).

The fullness and wonder of Josephine, however, extend beyond the physical world and its dwellings. As my family members detail their most coveted foods and food-making practices, they also engage in geographic expression, drawing attention to the saying, theorizing, feeling, knowing, and imagining of space and place that connect them to Josephine, our ancestral homeplace. While Josephine is a physical place, I use *homeplace* here to situate Josephine symbolically and metaphysically in an analytics of time and space that tend to the struggles and uncertainties of Black life (Glissant, 1997;McKittrick, 2006). Yes, geographically, Josephine is our home, but it is not where we come from. I am reminded by McKittrick (2017) that “there is no *from*. There is no there, or somewhere, or place that a black from is anchored to...they are inventions, just as we are” (p. 97).

Situating Josephine through a posture of nowhere-ness, therefore, offers an analysis that situates time and space in relation to the praxis of Black being (McKittrick, 2017). With this in mind, I situate Josephine beyond its physicality and the limitations of positivist understandings of geography. Through this positioning, Josephine allows us to contend with Black struggles and reckon with ongoing displacement by continuously rooting, and at times re-rooting, ourselves to nourish and sustain our being and sense of belonging. We carry Josephine with us, because Josephine is us. Josephine is the knowledge that the women in my family carry with them and

pass on. Josephine is the knowledge that keeps us alive through the food-making practices and recipes that allow us to create and imagine spaces and places that tend to the uncertainty and nowhere-ness of Black life (McKittrick, 2017). The essence of Josephine is ever-present in the kitchens of each woman who shares the Paige family lineage. Whether it is in the kitchen utensils that have been passed down, the recipes that have followed us, or the food-making practices taught to us by our foremothers, the kitchens that now feed us still maintain our ancestral and familial connection to Josephine, even when we are separated by time and space. Josephine is the epicenter of the Paige family's care and knowledge-making, which informs this study.

Participants

As a Black woman and member of the Paige family, I leveraged my insider-outsider position (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2017), and intimate relationships with the women in my family to identify potential participants for my study. My close proximity to my mom and grandma, for example, allowed me to engage both women in preliminary conversations about my study. In our preliminary conversations, my mom and grandma also identified and suggested other family members who could be recruited to participate in the study. Through this process, my mom and grandma emerged as key informants that guided my data collection and analysis.

My grandma, whom I refer to as "Queenie" in my study, is the oldest living woman in my immediate family. Queenie was born and raised on Josephine Street and has very fond and extensive memories of the food and family stories that have been created and shared in Josephine's kitchen. Queenie's daughter, and my mother, whom I refer to as "Tina," also holds valuable knowledge of food-making practices and family stories as a result of time spent with Paige family elders. What is significant about Tina's emergence as a key informant is that in the early stages of my study and throughout data collection, Tina was able to confirm, and at times,

correct information shared by Queenie. For this reason, I found Tina to be an extremely insightful and reliable informant to support the insights I gained from Queenie.

As Queenie and Tina recommended prospective participants, I gained preliminary insights into some of the knowledge-making and vetting processes of my family members. As Queenie and Tina suggested participants the two women would discuss and evaluate what experiences and knowledge each participant could bring to my study. One specific criterion for prospective participants was that they know how cook, or at least have a deep understanding of the family's food practices and family stories. Also, important to both Queenie and Tina, was identifying women in our family who spent time cooking and learning from elders in our family, such as my great-grandma, "Grandma Thelma", and my great-aunt, "Aunt Sheila."

Due to the communal nature of my family and the expansiveness of our foodways, preliminary conversations with Queenie and Tina also revealed prospective participants who do not share the Paige family's origins but have cemented themselves as sisters, aunties, and mothers through the spirit. They have fed us, kept us warm, and shared recipes, grafting themselves to our family as we collectively find ways to heal and thrive. In fact, some of the foods and recipes most celebrated in our family, such as Queenie's poundcake, were made possible by the communing and joining of family members we picked up along the way. As such, these women, were also identified as prospective participants as their experiences and knowledge-making processes have significantly impacted many of the women in our family.

Based on my preliminary conversations with key informants Queenie and Tina, I identified nine Black women in our family to recruit for my study. I recruited family members by speaking to the women over the phone or in person at family events and gatherings such as celebrations, cookouts, and dinners. As I spoke with my family members, I shared information

about my study and asked preliminary questions about their food-making experiences and family stories related to food. As the women in my family expressed their interest and willingness to participate in my study, I set up times to speak or meet with participants to engage in intimate conversations and food-making.

Before collecting data with my family members, I obtained consent and reviewed the topic and research questions with each person. I also provided an overview of my research procedures. Family members who participated were invited to (a) reflect on family recipes and food-making practices, (b) recount family stories related to food and food-making, and (c) collect and share anecdotes and cultural artifacts to support my data collection process. Because this study is primarily concerned with Black women's epistemologies as they emerge through food and relationality within one specific kinship structure, this family-based sample is methodologically appropriate. To introduce my participants, I use narrative vignettes rather than conventional demographic profiles. This choice is methodologically intentional and rooted in my Black feminist epistemologies that understand knowledge as relational, embodied, and situated within a gendered and racialized context rather than abstracted from the conditions of its production.

These vignettes, presented in my findings, portray the participants in my study as kin, but also as people deeply embedded in their care networks, foodways, environments, and histories that shape what they know and how they know it. These portraits also foreground everyday practices such as cooking, growing, remembering, feeding, and being fed as sites through which knowledge is created and shared across generations and geographies. I treat these intimate details as analytical entry points that show how food becomes a conduit for survival, belonging, and resistance. In this way, the vignettes function as a bridge between lived experiences and theory,

situating participants within the social, spiritual, and ecological worlds that facilitate knowledge-making.

Data Collection

Preliminary data were collected over two years during the pilot phase of this study. Additional data were then collected over eight months, spanning my family's most significant celebrations, gatherings, and holidays, which require extensive food preparation through time spent in the kitchen and in relationship with other family members. During these events, data were gathered through artifacts, intimate conversations, participant observation, and a research journal.

The data collection methods described below highlight the different contexts in which the women in my family create and share knowledge through food-making and storytelling. It was important for me to meet the women where they were to create a familiar and intimate environment where they could openly share their experiences, stories, and wisdom. As part of the data collection process, I used pseudonyms to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of family members. All data were stored securely on a password-protected digital drive.

Artifacts

Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2012) suggest that researchers pay attention to the material aspects of cultural artifacts and objects to gain a deeper understanding of cultural rules and rituals. I therefore engage cultural objects and artifacts as “readable text” (p. 124) that offer deeper insights directing and guiding conversations and the stories the women in my family tell (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). By engaging material culture, I gain insight into the meaning and history of artifacts such as food, kitchen objects, and recipes (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). The women in my family are keepers of many important cultural artifacts that offer

insight into the knowledge and interiority of their aliveness (Quashie, 2021). As I acquired artifacts from my family members, I took photos and wrote research memos in my researcher journal.

More specifically, I took note of how the everyday use of artifacts revealed more about how the women in my family create and share knowledge of aliveness by engaging Black womanist foodways. From handwritten recipes, cast-iron skillets, and a Foley brand food mill, the artifacts that the women in my family shared offered deeper insight into how knowledge is created and shared generationally through the passing of objects over time. For instance, my great-aunt Pete's written pocket roll recipe was used as a conversational tool to offer one example of how food-making practices and thus knowledge are passed intergenerationally. Originally written down by my grandmother to remember her aunt Pete's most popular recipe, this recipe allowed my family to preserve a staple recipe for family events, gatherings, and holidays. Not written on the recipe are the memories and family stories shared by the women in my family as they pulled apart and savored Aunt Pete's buttery pocket rolls. This is the essence of my family's cultural artifacts—and thus the stories each artifact holds.

Intimate Conversations

As an alternative to interviewing the women in my family, I engaged in *intimate conversation* with the women in my family to facilitate organic dialogue based on the relationships I have established with my family members. Although these conversations were audio- and video-recorded, I also took field notes in my research journal. The women selected for these intimate conversations were identified based on their role as a prominent elder, gatekeeper, historian, or key food-maker in our family. It is important to note that these roles are

fluid and reflective of time spent in relationship with family members in the kitchen, as well as knowledge of food-making and family stories.

The women in my family often occupy more than one role based on their positioning in the family, and the knowledge-vetting processes they have participated in. For example, Tina occupies multiple roles as a gatekeeper and key food-maker. This is largely due to Tina's extensive time spent cooking with the women in our family. Through intimate conversations, I was able to learn more about the role each woman played in our family, and if that role has changed as family dynamics change over time due to conflict, death, or relocation. I was also able to learn more about what practices and values were important to the women in my family as they guided the conversation based on their favorite foods, memories, and stories.

Participant Observation

Participant observation has long been employed as a method in ethnography wherein researchers closely observe research events by directly participating in the action as a member or participant (Geertz, 1973; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The strength of participant observation is in providing a thick description of the event to understand cultural behaviors (Geertz, 1973). This process was especially intimate as participant observation events were conducted in the kitchens of my family members as we prepared food for celebrations, gatherings, and holidays.

The process of food preparation took between four and eight hours, depending on the event or occasion. During the preparation and serving of food, I assisted the women throughout each step of the food-making process. While participant observation events were recorded, I also took field notes throughout the process. My main priority, however, was remaining fully immersed in the food-making practices and processes of my family. Through participant

observation, I was able to capture the cultural practices and group dynamics of my family to observe space and settings, as well as cultural material, to contextualize the food-making practices and family stories shared by the women. After participant observation events, I wrote reflections of my experiences and initial thoughts in my research journal.

Research Journal

Fieldnotes involve “inscriptions of social life and social discourse” (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 12). Emmerson et al. (2011) assert, “fieldnotes are products of, and reflect conventions for, *transforming* witnessed events, persons, and places into words on paper” (p. 12). Fieldnotes thereby describe the sensitivities and deeper meanings of data beyond written text and transcription, framing data in the specific context of the event (Emerson et al., 2011). As data was collected over an extended period of time, I had the opportunity to spend extensive time with my family members as they shared their stories and engaged in food-making with me.

During data collection events such as celebrations, gatherings, and holidays, I took field notes in my research journal. Specifically, I documented observations, interactions between the women in my family, and the details of the setting. Reflecting on my own experiences during the data collection event, I documented initial ideas and theories related to the women in my family. Specifically, I was interested in documenting examples of the women creating and sharing knowledge as throughout the food-making process.

My research journal also became an important place to process the emotions and feelings of the women and me that emerged throughout the data collection process. This process of reflexivity allowed me to work through tensions and vulnerabilities that arose as the women in my family, and even myself, navigated personal and deeply sensitive issues that came up during data collection events. My research journal was also an incredibly valuable tool for challenging

my own assumptions and preconceived notions about what I thought I already knew about the women in my family and how they create and share knowledge-making practices through food-making and family stories.

Data Analysis

My data analysis methods reflect the belief that “data doesn’t speak for itself, it needs a storyteller” (Duarte, 2019, p. 5). For the women in my family, the data and the stories that come from it are situated in a specific political, social, and ethical context relevant to Black women and the intersecting forms of marginalization they experience (Crenshaw, 1989). For this reason, it was important for me to engage in data analysis with great care and respect. The data I collected is rich, personal, and deeply sensitive to the women in my family. They have trusted me with their knowledge and stories, and so I sought an approach to data analysis that honored the close relationships and trust between my family and me.

This process required me to consider ethical challenges with care and approach data analysis in a way that protected the integrity and well-being of the women in my family. To ensure that my family members could provide feedback and fact-checking and ensure the accuracy of my analysis, I engaged in member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and the triangulation of data (Denzin, 1970; Fielding & Fielding, 1986). This process is explained in detail in the validity section of my methods chapter.

Coding

Data were analyzed using a hybrid deductive and inductive coding process informed by grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; LaRossa, 2005) and guided by my research questions and conceptual framework. Rather than employing classical grounded theory methods to generate codes from scratch, I used grounded theory’s coding procedures such as line-by-line

coding, constant comparison, and analytic memo writing to examine how knowledge is created and shared intergenerationally through food and family stories rooted in aliveness (Quashie, 2021). I began with *a priori* codes derived from my research questions, which were further refined through analytic sub-questions that captured and defined the following parent codes: intergenerational knowledge transmission, knowledge innovation, family memories (stories), and Black aliveness in food and food-making contexts. This deductive coding phase provided an initial coding framework that guided a rich, systematic analysis and supported the identification of thematic patterns across the data. Multiple coding passes were conducted to identify excerpts that could be categorized by parent and corresponding child codes. Transcripts and field notes were reviewed line-by-line and coded manually, by hand, with excerpts assigned to one or more relevant codes.

The decision to code by hand was both methodological and ethical. Because participants are my own family members, and the data often consisted of deeply intimate memories, recipes, and stories, it was essential to approach data analysis with care, fidelity, and reverence. As an insider within these familial and kinship structures, I sought to protect the women and the knowledge they shared while honoring the cultural and affective dimensions of their narratives. This insider position not only facilitated my access to rich, nuanced data but also shaped my analytic priorities during coding, as I was deeply aware of my responsibility to faithfully and respectfully represent my family members' lived experiences. However, as a researcher, my connection to the academy also complicated my insider position, necessitating a reflexive stance that recognized how my interpretations are shaped by me and my family's shared history and culture, as well as the epistemic lens I have developed within the academy.

This tension required me to rely on my family to authenticate and vet my analysis, as well as to approve the data and analytic themes that would be shared publicly. To ensure participatory validation and ethical rigor, I engaged my family members in collaborative discussion, regular feedback sessions, and sought their consent on the narratives developed. This approach encouraged open dialogue, allowing family members to express their perspectives and concerns, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings. Hand coding enabled sustained engagement with the data, particularly given the ways the narratives are situated within gendered, racialized, and intergenerational contexts. Printing and annotating each transcript by hand also allowed me to remain closely connected to participants' voices, memories, and the contextual textures of each exchange in ways that felt more intimate and analytically generative than electronic coding. Throughout the coding process, select passages were double-coded to ensure consistency, and analytic memos were written to document emerging patterns, relationships between codes, and evolving interpretations.

Although coding was guided by *a priori* categories, inductive codes were added to capture patterns and meanings found in the data. One key emergent code was *spaces and places of aliveness*, which reflect the embodiment of Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021) as it is enacted through care, connection, and food across spatial and geographic contexts, such as gardens, kitchens, dining room tables, and living rooms. This code emerged from narratives that illustrate how space and place inform food and food-making practices that have nourished and sustained multiple generations of women in my family. This code contextualizes the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and knowledge innovation within spaces and places of aliveness, the geographic sites where learning often takes place in this study. These spaces and places of aliveness often require a particular type of knowledge that informs how one navigates and

produces food to stay alive, for instance, through foraging and gardening. Inductive coding also captured sensory details, recurring phrases, and culturally significant practices that fall outside the deductive coding framework. These codes were then clustered into broader analytic categories that deepened and contextualized the deductive codes, adding nuance and texture to the developing patterns and themes.

Following initial coding, I engaged in a second phase of relational thematic clustering in which data were organized around recurring foods and recipes, shared family stories, collective memories, and thematic overlap across participants. For example, Lulu, Josefina Iris, and Lainey each shared memories connected to Grandma Thelma's applesauce. Tina, Lulu, and Queenie discussed the origins of our family's poundcake recipe. Queenie and Lainey also reflected on growing up on Josephine Street during Jim Crow and witnessing and participating in the food procurement and preparation processes. Examining these thematic overlaps allowed me to identify generational clusters among the women in my family and trace patterns of care, knowledge transmission, adaptation, and aliveness across time. These generational clusters informed the analytic findings presented in the following chapter. A full description of my coding terms can be found in my codebook in the Appendix.

Risks and Benefits

As I am conducting ethnographic research on my family, maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of the women in my family can be increasingly difficult (Adams & Manning). Given the personal vignettes of the women in my study, it is extremely difficult to fully disguise the women referenced in my study (Adams & Manning, 2015). As such, I take great care with the personal information and intimate details of the women in my family, understanding how they could be implicated or put at risk by participating in my study. One way that I do this is by

using pseudonyms and creating vignettes that have been co-created with the women in my family (Adams & Manning, 2015). In doing so, I also aim to provide the women in my family with the opportunity to tell their own stories and determine what they would and would not like to be shared.

Conducting research with my family members required me to carefully navigate my positions, through tension between myself and my family, and the requirements of the university. As a doctoral candidate, I understand how I am ultimately the beneficiary of this study. While my family members who participate in this study do not benefit materially, I am cognizant of how I can reduce harm and assist them by leveraging this study to protect and preserve our family's heritage and historical sites. One way that I plan to achieve this is by providing my family members with a copy of this study so they may never forget the food-making practices and knowledge that has carried us through. Additionally, I plan to provide a copy of this study to the Josephine City museum to support the museum's archives and preservation efforts.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from the women in my family and documented with a signed, written consent form found in the appendix. Informed consent required negotiating with my family members about how research would be conducted and how results would be reported. This process also required me to allow the women in my family to participate in the study as much or as little as they desired. This was especially important to honor as this study placed the women in my family in extremely vulnerable position where they were asked to share their minds, hearts, and kitchens, with an academic world they did not necessarily consent to be in. By acquiring the informed consent of my family members through each step of my research process,

I aimed to conduct research ethically, while mitigating the harm and exploitation of the Black women in my family.

Validity

Adams and Manning (2015) contend that “it may be severely inappropriate, and even silly, to use criteria such as reliability, validity, and generalizability” (p. 360) when evaluating creative and artistic ethnographic studies. In this study, the conventional evaluative criteria such as reliability, validity, and generalizability are not fully adequate for assessing a critical ethnographic study so deeply informed by the relationality of Black women and the narratives they share. For this reason, I rely on the women in my family to validate the truths in the data through triangulation (Denzin, 1970; Fielding & Fielding, 1985), and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data triangulation refers to the use of multiple sources of data to increase the credibility and validity of research findings (Denzin, 1970; Fielding & Fielding, 1985). Using data triangulation, I supported my analysis and research findings with multiple data points taken from a variety of data sources. This process provided me with the internal validity needed to offer a deep and contextual understanding of the data as reflected in my findings section (Denzin, 1970; Fielding & Fielding, 1985). This method was further strengthened by using member checking throughout my research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is a technique used in qualitative research whereby researchers invite participants to confirm, build upon, and amend qualitative data, data interpretation, and data findings. In my study, this looked like family members using their firsthand knowledge of the research context to confirm my findings and interpretations. In my member checking process, I solicited feedback from family members to determine if my

analysis and findings rang true. I found that when used hand in hand with data triangulation (Denzin, 1970), member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) increased the credibility, dependability, and overall trustworthiness of my study.

Study Significance

Traditionally, researchers seem themselves and those in the ivory tower as holders of knowledge (Bauman & Briggs, 2003; Conquergood, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Fricker, 2007). In this study, I seek to gain a robust understanding of the epistemological practices of the Black women in my family by analyzing family stories and food-making practices. I argue that the knowledge gained and valued in my community begins with family and is passed through the food-practices and stories we share (Barnes, 2006; Bylund, 2003; Byng-Hall & Thompson, 1990; Rowe, 2022; Smith, 2020). My study makes the case that food-making and storytelling can be a rich site to explore the rich and expansive epistemological practices of Black women and girls. In better understanding this knowledge, we might also gain deeper insights into the knowing and doing of aliveness (Quashie, 2021).

In the context of education, my aim is for this knowledge to be used to support the well-being of Black communities, students, and teachers. By engaging alternative epistemologies, rooted in aliveness (Quashie, 2021), we engage tools necessary for imagining an otherwise. A world in which Black education is theorized beyond the constraints of anti-blackness and white supremacy and instead through an ethic and posture of aliveness (Givens, 2020; ross, 2020; Quashie, 2021; Warren & Coles, 2016). I offer this study as one example of what the knowing and doing of aliveness looks like, in hopes that we might use this study as an exemplar to sustain the being of all Black life (Quashie, 2021)

Prologue

Like other historically Black communities, Josephine Street has been shaped as much by what was taken away as by what remains. To the outside world, Josephine Street appears to be the remnants of a place of the past. As few of the physical dwellings that once served as places of commerce, leisure, and worship exist today, many consider Josephine to be abandoned and dilapidated (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2015; Wade, 2022). And yet, to the descendants of those whom she cared for and sheltered during times of uncertainty, Josephine Street is a living, breathing reminder of our survival. Here, the homes of our ancestors sit close together, with yards lined by chain-link fences and oak trees that kept us cool in the summer. Here, the Norfolk Southern Railroad passes by over tracks that were once lined with wild asparagus. Here, my grandmother would send us to church in our thick, department-store stockings, in 1,000-degree weather.

It is here, on Josephine Street, where my family always returned, gathering every year for Easter, Mother's Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Looking at my family's house on Josephine Street today, it amazes me how we could fit our entire family in such a small house. It amazes me even more how my family was able to feed everyone, even visitors. My great-grandma's sauerkraut, my grandma's potato salad, my great-aunt Sheila's deviled eggs, and my great-great aunt Pete's pocket rolls. Greens, macaroni and cheese, candied yams, sweet potatoes with fluffy marshmallows on top, chicken from Martin's, ham with pineapple rings, turkey, and stuffing. We never ran out of food, ever. And even though my family did not always show it outwardly, we never ran out of love, either.

I do not remember when exactly it happened. But it seems like we gather more for funerals than for family gatherings today. And yet, our memories of food and family remain just

as vivid as the foods we once gathered around. Despite great devastation and loss, our family's most cherished foods and recipes live on. Through memory and relationship with one another, our foods live on, and with them so does our knowledge of care and survival.

This sharing of knowledge and care through food is not new or accidental. It is what the women in my family have done for over five generations to ensure the survival of their families. And even though we no longer gather on Josephine Street, the lessons the women in my family learned from Josephine through food were transferable, transcending time and space through acts of knowledge and care. The women gardened. They learned to stretch food and preserve it. They learned to make substitutes. And so, the recipes they carried with them through displacement and even grief taught them not only to survive but also to make a home, even when yours has been fractured.

Within this context, food is not just something to be eaten; it is something that is navigated and prepared for care and survival. Food is the essence of belonging, memory, and safety, foundational to sustaining cultural continuity. For this reason, I embed the foods and family stories shared in this chapter in Josephine's racialized ecology, refusing to separate the women and the knowledge they share from their origins.

Overview of Findings

This study examines Black women's epistemologies through the context of everyday cultural practices such as food-making and storytelling. Across family narratives, food stories, and recipes shared by the women in my family, kitchens, gardens, and dining room tables function as sites of knowledge production. In these spaces, food, knowledge, and care converge as the women leverage their intimate relationships and cultural practices to survive. The findings presented in this chapter respond to the following questions:

- (1) What intergenerational knowledge do the Black women in my family share, and what new knowledge do they create, through food and food-making?
- (2) What do the stories they tell and uncover through their foods and food-making practices illuminate about Black aliveness?

My theoretical framework supported the organization of my findings by orienting the questions I asked the data and the patterns I traced across food stories, observations, and narratives. I begin with Black feminist epistemologies (Collins, 1990) as the analytical lens that situates food as a material expression of knowledge that is created in response to structural constraints and violence. Based on this understanding, food highlights the plasticity of Black women's knowledge, as they adapt and change recipes and food-making practices in response to environmental changes and disturbances (Chen & Zhang, 2026; García Carrasco et al., 2015). These adaptive and responsive cultural practices are shared intergenerationally and maintained by the women's commitment to Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021). Here, I use Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021) to capture how perpetuity is made possible through everyday cultural and knowledge-making practices informed by food.

With my theoretical lens well-established, I returned to my coding process, further refining my research questions through analytic sub questions. These sub questions helped me capture and define intergenerational knowledge transmission, new knowledge/innovation, food stories, and Black aliveness in the data, using parent-child codes linked to my research questions. For example, "adaptation" was identified as a child code of "new knowledge/innovation," both of which directly connect to my first research question. Next, I grouped related codes based on shared thematic connections and overarching narratives, identifying intergenerational

knowledge-making practices of the women in my family that illuminated aliveness (Quashie, 2021). These analytical patterns would serve as the basis for my study's findings.

I organized the data's themes into two narrative arcs that respond to my research questions and serve as the structural analysis for my study's findings. Arc I, *Contextualizing Black Women's Knowledge*, addresses my first research question by contextualizing the knowledge shared by the women in my family through food and food-making. Arc II, *Knowledge Transfer Across Generations*, further explores my first research question, by highlighting the transfer of intergenerational knowledge as well as new knowledge created through food and food-making. Together, Arc I and Arc II provide a foundation for the discussion of my findings that attends to my second research question by examining how the narratives of the women in my family illuminate aliveness (Quashie, 2021).

Rather than following a traditional literary arc model with a beginning, middle, and end (Freytag, 1894), these arcs function as analytical containers that grapple with tension, grief, and interruption. By choosing a nonlinear arc movement, I engage the women in the past, present, and future, as their knowledge-practices transcend spatial and temporal boundaries through food and food-making. The narrative arcs synthesize multiple experiences, voices, moments, and food-making practices that demonstrate how knowledge-making is deeply relational and rooted in gendered and racialized contexts. Each arc also affirms that food and food-making practices are rooted in an epistemic context that reflects an overall commitment to the perpetuation of Black life and being. Through the narrative arcs, the women in my family remain grounded in the Black worlds that shape and contextualize knowledge production and meaning-making. With this in mind, my findings are presented through multi-layered narratives that remain

unfragmented and cohesive in their treatment of social processes, relationships, and patterned meanings across accounts and lived experiences.

Narrative Vignettes

The narrative arcs are prefaced by narrative vignettes reconstructed from the data and composed of interviews, observations, and artifacts that connect the women in my family through food and intimate relationships. The narrative vignettes operate as analytic entry points into the findings, rather than functioning solely as descriptive portraits. The following co-constructed vignettes invite the women's voices to lead, showing how knowledge, memory, and care move through gardens, kitchens, and tables across multiple generations:

Josephine Street

Josephine is shaped by the irrecoverable violence of slavery and the false pretenses of emancipation. For this reason, she reminds us that “no people can flourish who are without homes” (Douglass, 1870, p. 2). So, in 1870, she provided everything Lucy Collins Franklin and Benjamin Franklin needed to reunite their family and lay permanent roots. For the first time, Lucy and Benjamin would be able to keep their family intact. Through Josephine's assistance, their family would continue for over seven generations. She cared for Lucy and Benjamin, their children, and their children's children, all the same. She taught them how to find and prepare food. She taught them how to care for themselves and their families. But most importantly, she taught them how to stay alive. Josephine became a homeplace for the descendants of Lucy and Benjamin. But time quickly reminded them that *home is not a place*, that Josephine is more than just a place. Josephine is the knowledge that the descendants of Lucy and Benjamin carry with them through grief, loss, and displacement. Josephine is the knowledge they pass on through

their foods and stories. This knowledge reminds us that we are stronger together than on our own. And that our care networks are bound by neither blood nor biology.

Tina

Tina learned to cook by hanging out next door at Nanny's house, where she watched Nanny cook. Nanny was Tina's great-aunt, and Tina was Nanny's *favorite*. Although Nanny's kitchen was only big enough for two people, it was full of Nanny's love. Next to the sink was Nanny's old, white stove, where Tina learned how to cook for herself and her sisters while her mother was working. Although Nanny is no longer here physically, Tina tries to remember and carry on what she learned from Nanny. This felt-and-embodied knowledge (Million, 2009) guides Tina's way around the kitchen. She never measures her ingredients because she can *eyeball it*. She hears the water boiling and knows when to add her ingredients or remove the pot from the stove. She can smell her poundcake when it is cooking and see that it is almost ready. She can stretch her last \$10 or \$20 to make a meal that feeds her entire family. She recreates recipes from memory, using only her sense of taste to get it right. For Tina, cooking is considered one of her spiritual gifts. Cooking relaxes her and takes her mind off things, helping her release the stress and pressure of her everyday life. She cherishes her recipes as much as she cherishes her family, because to Tina, food and family give her life.

Queenie

Queenie was born and raised on Josephine Street, surrounded by her entire family, where food was prepared from scratch with love and care. Here, she watched her grandfather butcher hogs, providing the family with meat, lard, and cracklings. As a young girl, Queenie's Aunt Alice taught her how to forage the railroad tracks for wild asparagus and field cress. Her Aunt Mazie taught her how to garden and can vegetables like beets, green beans, and tomatoes.

Tenderly referred to as her mother's *ace* in the kitchen, Queenie scalded and plucked chickens so her mother could prepare fried chicken. She fondly remembers her mother's wooden stove and cast-iron skillets, where she cooked biscuits, beans, hominy grits, liver and gravy, boiled potatoes, and homemade applesauce that kept her family satiated in times of uncertainty. It is by watching her mother, who watched *her* mother, that Queenie learned to be a good cook. While Queenie believes cooking ability is passed down through generations, she emphasizes that being a *good* cook is about feeling, remembering, and watching. For this reason, Queenie's recipes are often safeguarded and never written down, shared only with her children and grandchildren to carry on her most cherished foods and traditions.

Lainey

Lainey is deeply rooted in the rich history of Josephine, where she was born and raised with her siblings and cousins, and constantly embraced by the care of her parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Her mother, Thelma, often relied on her sister, Queenie, to cook. And her sister, Sheila, would usually put her out of the kitchen for moving too slowly. So, while Lainey often watched her mother and sisters in the kitchen, she never really learned to cook. It wasn't until Lainey moved to the D.C. area and started her own family that she forged her own relationship with food and cooking. She would experiment with the cookbooks her Aunt Alice gave her with deep affection. It was through these cookbooks and trial and error that Lainey learned how to cook for herself and her family. Although Lainey made a life for herself, with many successes, she never forgot her roots or how to find her way home. This was especially important for Lainey during the holidays, when she would surround herself with her entire family and her favorite foods. Lainey believes nothing is more important than family and

gathering around the food we have prepared for generations, because this is how we maintain and protect our Paige family heritage.

Josefina Iris

Josefina Iris grew up on Josephine Street, sitting around the busy kitchen, always filled with aunts and cousins. The most profound memories she holds near to her heart are during the holidays, when her mother, Thelma, and sister, Sheila, would cook all day and night to prepare food for the family. She loved sitting in the kitchen, watching her mother and sister cook, often helping by chopping onions, celery, and potatoes. Spending time in the kitchen with her mother is how Josefina Iris learned to make her mother's homemade apple sauce. Her mother never wrote down her applesauce recipe and never measured her ingredients, so Josefina Iris learned by watching and asking questions. She enjoyed this time spent with her mother but cherishes it even more now because her mother is no longer here. And yet, her mother's applesauce still brings her great comfort, as if she were still here making it with her today. Josefina Iris prepares her mother's applesauce from memory, using her senses to guide her until it tastes just right. When she gets it just right, her applesauce tastes like home, connecting her to her most beloved memories and time spent bonding and gathering around food and family on Josephine Street.

Emma Jean

Emma Jean was born and raised in Danville, Virginia, where she lived and worked on her family's farm. As the baby girl in her family, she treasured spending time with her father, Clayton, making his famous gingerbread cookies and molasses pudding, which were always stored in the family's china cabinet alongside her mother's cakes and pies. Emma Jean would often go to the cannery with her mother to can fruits, jam, and veggies in mason jars from the five-and-dime store. It is through spending time with her parents that Emma Jean learned how to

bake and cook. Some of her specialties were German chocolate, red velvet, and coconut cakes. And for breakfast, biscuits, fried apples, and pancakes, all made from scratch. But what Emma Jean loved making most was her famous, homemade, baked macaroni and cheese. This was also the first recipe she shared with Tina, whom she affectionately treated as her own daughter. Emma Jean believed that sharing recipes with those you love was important because that's how things get passed *down the line*. Emma Jean believed that by passing down food, we also pass down our history. So, she lovingly shared her recipes with those who showed interest and appreciation in maintaining our family's food traditions.

Mama Marsh'

Mama Marsh was born and raised in Manning, South Carolina, where she and her three sisters grew up on her family's farm. Here, Mama Marsh would labor under the Carolina sun, picking tobacco leaves with her father and sisters. With fingers stained by tobacco leaves, Mama Marsh would return home, where she was greeted by the aroma of her mother's black-eyed peas, neckbones, and sweet bread that would melt in her mouth. While her mother's meals were never fancy, they were reminders of her resilience and the love she showed through her care. As Mama Marsh grew, she would learn her mother's recipes, which had been passed down through generations. Among her favorite recipes is Perlo rice, which many have tried, but none have been able to replicate without her touch of care, love, or divine timing that lingers longer after your plate is clear. Her food is more than ingredients thrown together. Her kitchen is more than a place to cook. It is her sanctuary, where stories are shared, laughter echoes, and traditions are preserved. Her kitchen is where her love permeates through prayers spoken over hoppin' john, jowl, neckbones, and spaghetti. Her kitchen is our home away from home.

Lulu

Lulu lovingly remembers sneaking her Grandma Thelma's hot, homemade, buttered biscuits and rearranging them before Grandma Thelma could notice. She would often slather the biscuits with homemade apple butter that she often helped her grandma prepare. As she sat around her grandma's dining room table with her cousins and aunts, she would peel apples for her grandma until her hands cramped. She vividly remembers staring in awe as her grandma peeled the apples by hand in a single swirl of skin. As the first grandchild, she spent many days on Josephine Street with her Grandma Thelma and her cousins, aunts, and uncles. Although Lulu is not considered a cook in the family, she has a wealth of knowledge from a childhood of watching and tasting the foods that brought everyone home for the holidays. Her pictures and recorded recipes of Paige elders serve as reminders to the younger generation that *you don't know what you have until it's gone*. For this reason, Lulu encourages the younger generations of the Paige family to spend time with their elders and record as much as possible, so our culinary and family traditions live on.

Cece

From a young age, Cece carefully watched her Grandma Thelma and mother, Sheila, as they cooked in the kitchen on Josephine, her childhood home. Cece never learned any written recipes, because there weren't any. Her grandma and mother just *knew* what and how much to put in a dish to make it taste good. There was always food cooking at Josephine, and there was always enough for everybody, even visitors passing by. This was especially true during the holidays, when it was all but impossible not to put more on your plate than what you could eat. But it is the everyday foods cooked by Cece's grandma and mom that are etched in her memory. Beans and weenies, her grandma's homemade apple sauce, and fresh-baked rolls. These seemingly ordinary and simple foods were Cece's favorites, not just because she was a picky

eater, but because they were all made with love. Although her mother and grandma are no longer with her, Cece's memories of the foods they shared around the table comfort her and remind her of the love they shared through food. In remembering the foods of our matriarchs, Cece has learned to cherish the times she spent with her family, because family *is all we got*.

Sarai

As a new mother, Sarai has a newfound appreciation for the foods and recipes that were once shared through four generations of women in our family. She fondly remembers the summers and holidays she spent in Virginia, where she was surrounded by her grandmother, great-grandmother, aunts, and cousins. Although she is not known to be a cook, her memories demonstrate how food has brought our family together. These memories also shape Sarai's motivation to ensure that her daughter develops a close relationship with her own grandmother and great-grandmother, fostered by the recipes they have shared. For this reason, Sarai tries to preserve her elders' knowledge as much as possible. This often looks like calling her mother or grandmother for guidance on a recipe. Or recording her mother or grandmother as they make a pound cake or rolls. This also looks like Sarai opening her own home on the holidays, so our family has a place to gather and be together like we used to on Josephine. Sarai is ultimately motivated by the desire to soak up all the wisdom and knowledge offered by the elders who have fed and cared for her, who now feed and care for her daughter, so that her memories of the foods and women she cherishes most continue to live on.

Cambria

I began this study to speak to my ancestors and elders one more time, and to show them how thankful I am for their sacrifices. I share this story because I can no longer eat my grandma Thelma's applesauce at her kitchen table. Because we no longer gather in her living room on

Easter, Mother's Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas. This study is for all the times we sat outside under the big oak tree at 118, in a driveway lined by gravel and plastic wicker chairs. For the smile on my grandma's face when all of her grandchildren would pile on one pew in Zion Baptist Church. And for the times we would walk over to the Annex to eat my Aunt Sheila's cooking after church. This study is a result of the times when my mother would walk us down Josephine Street, past the railroad tracks, to visit my Granddaddy Teddy, and listen to his stories of the Invasion of Normandy. This study is the manifestation of hope for the future that reminds us to hold to what remains, even though so much has changed. It is a call to never forget where we have come from, or the place that we call home, as we still have one another, and the foods that we have gathered around.

On Earning It...A Brief Note on Narrative Vignettes

In the co-construction of the narrative vignettes, I leave room for the women to maintain their opacity (Glissant, 1990). The women exist through limited visibility, captured only in the anecdotes and stories they choose to share. Beyond what is shared, the women's full experiences and their connections to one another are difficult to distinguish and somewhat illegible. This creative decision is meant to pace the reader as they learn and engage more deeply with the women throughout the chapter. To understand these unique and dynamic women, the reader must first acclimate themselves to the worlds they inhabit.

In the vignettes, time is felt rather than explained. Loss is sensed, and yet unnamed. Kinship and genealogy extend beyond conventional biological understanding. These moments of ambiguity woven in each vignette are intentional, and yet for those who resonate with the foods, recipes, and stories shared, *what's understood doesn't need to be explained*. In each narrative vignette, the women map memory, grief, and intergenerational knowledge-making through food.

Taken together, the vignettes demonstrate how the past, present, and future are engulfed in every bite, preparing the reader to time-travel through the intimate memories and food stories shared by the women in my family.

Arc I: Contextualizing Black Women's Knowledge

The first narrative arc contextualizes the knowledge of Black women in my family by challenging conventional understandings of knowledge, often written and formalized and removed from the context in which it has been created (Conquergood, 2002; Collins, 1990). This arc foregrounds Black women's epistemologies that are rooted in observation, sensory engagement, relationality, and localized contexts. Across the data, the women consistently describe learning by watching elders, engaging their senses, and sharing food spaces with others, rather than through measurements, written recipes, or explicit instruction. Knowledge in this sense is not abstract or detached, but lived, embodied, and felt (Million, 2009) by multiple generations of women in my family.

The women's narratives further reveal that this learning process is deeply relational, as implicit knowledge is acquired through close proximity to mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and other elders, as well as through repeated exposure to Black women's foodways (Jones, 2019; White, 2018; Williams-Forson, 2006). Food spaces emerge as alternative pedagogical spaces where learning occurs through watching and doing, memorizing elders' movements, and using the senses to guide and validate what is known and how (Jones, 2019; White, 2018; Williams-Forson, 2006). As the data reinforces the body as a site of knowing, where intuition, memory, and the senses guide knowledge production, this arc affirms ways of knowing rooted in embodied and localized knowledge, contextualized by the racialized and gendered experiences of the Black women in my family (Collins, 1990; Merleau-Ponty, 1945).

Embodied and Tacit Knowledge

Polanyi (1966) asserts that “we can know more than we tell” (p. 4). In this excerpt, Polanyi (1966) captures the essence of tacit knowledge as it is not easily codified or verbalized. Benner (1984) expands on conceptualizations of tacit knowledge asserting that this knowledge is largely embodied and acquired through repeated experiences that engage the body as a tool for learning and knowing. In this section I build on this definition by situating tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1958; 1966) as a central epistemological practice through which the women learn and transmit knowledge through their body and senses.

Within shared food-making spaces, the women embody this knowledge as they create and recreate family foods and recipes by watching and doing. In this context, the senses function not as supplements to knowledge-making, but as the primary means through which knowledge is acquired (Benner, 1984). The narratives of the women demonstrate that through tacit knowledge, the body functions as an active site of knowledge production, where intuition and sensory memory engage the senses through repeated acts of watching and participating in the preparation of food (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). Consistent across interviews and participant observations, my family members describe learning how to cook and prepare food by watching and modeling the behaviors of their elders.

Often, these women cannot rely on explicit instruction because recipes are rarely written down or recorded in our family. For this reason, learning how to prepare family foods is largely dependent on exposure that commonly occurs through time shared with elders. Through this exposure, tacit knowledge is modeled by elders and observed through the embodied food-making practices they share with younger generations. This process is evident in Cece’s reflection of time spent watching her grandma, Thelma, and mother, Sheila, in the kitchen. She shared:

“As far as like cooking with recipes, there really wasn’t...there really isn’t any recipes. They knew how, you know what goes in, where, how much goes in, there.”

In the absence of written recipes, Grandma Thelma, and Aunt Sheila, reflect Polanyi’s (1966) notion of *showing* knowledge rather than *telling* it. While ingredients and measurements are not explicitly revealed to Cece, the actions and behaviors modeled by her mother and grandmother allow her to recreate the same foods. Reiterating the lack of written recipes, she explained:

“I never learned any recipes. I just watched them. Grandma with her famous applesauce. I remember helping her...Mom’s sweet potatoes, I don’t know if they’re exactly like hers, but I think they’re close enough. And I mean...there’s no recipe, I just, you know, put in, and taste.”

Here, I emphasize *watching*, *helping*, and *tasting* as key moments in Cece’s learning process. I begin with watching as a key starting point for modeling how knowledge is acquired, observed, and understood. Helping then, shifts the learning process from observational to participatory, as Cece learns how to apply and replicate her knowledge. And lastly, tasting, is the process by which Cece validates the knowledge learned, assessing her outcome or final result, in this case, her mother’s sweet potatoes. Together, this process illustrates how tacit knowledge is learned in my family through observation, participation, and application.

It is important to note that for the women in my family, this is a process that occurs over time, and through constant repetition and experimentation. Cece, for instance, grew up in a multigenerational household with her mother and grandmother where she often spent time watching Grandma Thelma and Aunt Sheila cook. However, the recipes that she learned through repeated exposure and practice were mastered in adulthood. She shared:

“...sweet potatoes...beans and weenies. Those are really the only things that I *fix*, fix,

of mom's...she cooked so much and so many things, but I think those are my favorites, so I paid attention kind of to that. I wish I would have learned how to make grandma's rolls. I never got to learn how to do that."

Cece's reflection shows that learning opportunities are largely shaped by the time and attention spent watching how elders prepared food. Here, we see that women in my family, like Cece, are often confronted by the fragility of time as they attempt to hold on to the foods and knowledge they once shared with their elders. As Grandma Thelma and Aunt Sheila are no longer here physically, we are reminded of the temporal limitations of tacit knowledge. Given that in our family, elders play a significant role in modeling how to prepare family foods using the body and its senses, their absence often creates epistemic loss. As a result, the women in my family develop and engage tacit knowledge practices through alternative methods when close proximity to elders is not possible or no longer an option.

We turn to Tina who relies on her memories and a process of experimentation to recreate family foods in the absence of prominent family members like Nanny, Aunt Sheila, and Grandma Thelma. She noted:

"They're no longer living. So, I try to remember and carry on what has been shared with me...before grandma got sick, she told me how she did her sauerkraut and my sauerkraut tastes just like her sauerkraut when I make it."

Even in Grandma Thelma's absence, Tina demonstrates a confidence and certainty in her ability to recreate her grandma's sauerkraut. This is mainly because Tina has perfected our family's recipes through a repetitive process of experimentation, guided by her memories and senses.

Tina suggested:

“...after a while or if you’ve been cooking for a while, you don’t need to measure. You just add it, and you just know. Some foods I don’t taste, and other foods I do taste for seasoning. But for the most part, I just make it. I don’t need to try it because I know.”

Tina’s confidence in herself and her knowing did not come from explicit instruction or by following a recipe, but from refining and trusting her senses through years of cooking and practice. Through this process, Tina affirms that the body is a reliable and authoritative source of knowledge (Merleau-Ponty, 1945).

Tina’s cooking practices also highlight how memory strengthens the engagement of embodied senses (Merleau-Ponty, 1945) in the construction and validation of knowledge. Merleau-Ponty (1945) asserts, knowledge becomes well-known by the body with practice and familiarity. For Tina, both practice and familiarity are strengthened by her senses and memories of the cultural foods prepared by her family. This process is illustrated by Tina’s reflection on how she learned to make potato salad.

Although Tina’s mother, Queenie, often made potato salad, Tina did not begin making it herself until later in adulthood when she worked part-time at a restaurant. Rather than follow the restaurant’s potato salad recipe, Tina experimented with the recipe. She continued adjusting the recipe until it resembled the potato salad she remembered her mother making. Tina recalled:

“To be honest, I learned this recipe from working at [restaurant]. I watched my mother make it before, but I never tried it myself. Time to time I’d call her but I didn’t actually make it until I started working at [restaurant]...Because I didn’t have to do it, mom always made it.. And now everybody wants me to make it.”

What I find most remarkable about Tina’s reflection is that prior to this experience, Tina had never made potato salad before. Growing up, Tina did not have consistent exposure or practice

cooking with her mother. And after starting her own family and moving to a different state, learning directly from her mother would become even more difficult.

As there was no written or recorded recipe for potato salad Tina could not rely on explicit knowledge to recreate her mother's potato salad. And with her mother no longer in close proximity, she could not repeatedly watch her mother make potato salad either. Instead, she relied on her memories of how potato salad always tasted at family gatherings and celebrations to experiment with ingredients at her job. Guided by her memories and senses, Tina would continue experimenting until she finally recreated her mother's potato salad.

As Tina's daughter, I was ecstatic that she finally learned how to make potato salad because it meant that I would no longer have to wait for holidays and celebrations to have it. But now, as a researcher, I wondered why it was so important for Tina to recreate this recipe, especially at a part-time job. In a participant-observation with Tina, where she showed me how to make potato salad, I asked her why she changed the recipe provided by the restaurant. She corrected me, saying "I didn't change it. I doctored it up and made it with love." Continuing, Tina explained that she was motivated by a desire to make the potato salad taste good, like something she would serve her own family, because even though this was a part-time job, she gives 100% in everything that she does. Here, Tina provides a glimpse into the ethos that guides the women in my family as they cook and prepare food.

From a seemingly ordinary family food, like potato salad, Tina demonstrates that the women in my family engage tacit memory through practices that are embodied (Merleau-Ponty, 1945) and ethical. This is significant in that knowledge and food-making practices of the women in my family not only show what they know, but also what they value. This understanding is especially important to consider as the values of the women shape what knowledge is acquired

and how it is applied in the kinship structure (Collins, 1990). At the same time, the values of the women also shape what is worth knowing (Collins, 1990). In the following section, I use the narratives of Queenie, Lainey, and Josefina Iris to emphasize how knowledge and values are mutually reinforcing in the localized contexts that the women engage.

Contextual and Localized Knowledge

My interpretation of *values* in this study is informed by Black feminist epistemology and the assertion that “values lie at the heart of the knowledge validation process...” (Collins, 1990, p. 266). Based on this framing, I see the values and knowledge-making practices of the Black women in my family as inseparable. As knowledge informs what to do, and values inform why to do it (Horcea-Milcu et al., 2022), this relationship offers deeper insights into what knowledge is valuable to the women in my family and why. I conceptualize this knowledge as contextual and localized, as the women’s particular lived experiences and environments inform this epistemic process (Collins, 1990). Grounded in an acknowledgement that Black women are not a monolith, my understanding of contextual and localized knowledge accounts for multiplicity within the experiences of Black women and in the knowledge we produce (Collins, 1990).

Given the scope of my study, I engage food and food-making as a crucial site for analyzing how knowledge, values, and social relations converge. Before examining this confluence, however, I begin by contextualizing the sociocultural and historical influences that have shaped the production of knowledge, food, and values in my family (Williams-Forson, 2006). In doing so, I provide a foundational understanding of the social worlds and material conditions that undergird the values and knowledge that inform our food-making practices. This historical overview adds depth to the women’s narratives and underscores how their contextual and localized knowledge practices are ultimately rooted in a commitment to survival and

aliveness (Quashie, 2021). Through this engagement, I prepare readers for the narratives of the remaining elders in my family, who witnessed firsthand the formation of the values and knowledge we continue to hold today.

Historical Context of Josephine

The history and legacy of enslavement in Virginia, more specifically, the expansion of slavery into Eastern Frederick County (now Clarke), deeply situates the narratives woven together in this section (Kalbian, 1999). Santos (2023) contends, “...centuries-long and continent-spanning processes of violence, subjugation, exploitation, extermination, and alienation, enslavement and the traffic in enslaved women, men, and children have dramatically transformed social structures, kinship ties, across the Atlantic and beyond” (p. 332). In contemplating the knowledge and values of my family, I am reminded that the mere existence of my family defies the logics and racial arithmetic of enslavement (Sharpe, 2016). As Santos (2023) contends, “the conditions and (im)possibilities of forming a family, staying with one’s family, and tracing one’s family history” (p. 331) were characteristic, if not instrumental, to the institution of slavery. With family uprooting normalized and kinship ties transformed, if not completely destroyed, it is remarkable to be able to trace how my family endured this violence and survived for over six generations (Santos, 2023).

Overcoming what Du Bois (1908) refers to as the “complete crushing out of the African clan and family life” (p. 21), cannot be understated. Especially given the precarity of Black life as our lives are shortened through structural and state-sanctioned violence (Du Bois, 1908; Santos, 2023; Wells, 1892; 1901). This is an important contextual consideration because enslavement has directly shaped the circumstances and conditions that my family learned how to navigate to survive (Du Bois, 1908). From the First Passage, to the Barracoons, to the Middle

Passage, to the belly of the beast, death was all but promised. This same death awaited us on Tidewater plantations, in the violence of Reconstruction and Jim Crow, and in the failures of integration. And this same death welcomes us to the carceral archipelago. And yet, here we are, *by the grace of God* as my elders say. Condemned, and yet, perennial. This is our story.

In speaking with family historians and reviewing obituaries and death certificates, I traced my Paige family lineage through seven generations dating back to enslavement. Piecing together our genealogic roots and family histories, I found that our stories illustrate an overall commitment to aliveness (Quashie, 2021) and the perpetuation of family. This history is not merely a backdrop, it is the epistemic infrastructure that situates the practices created and shared on Josephine Street as responses to the afterlives of enslavement (Sharpe, 2016).

Our story begins with Benjamin Franklin, my sixth great-grandfather, who was born into enslavement in 1840. The son of Frank Franklin, and a mother whom he was separated from before he could even learn her name, we know little else about the early life of my great-grandfather, Benjamin. From his death certificate, signed in 1927, we assume that after emancipation, he was reunited with his wife, Lucy Franklin. What is interesting here is that my great-grandma, Lucy, was enslaved 171 miles south of my great-grandfather in Dinwiddie County, Virginia. Given that official marriage certificates for Black people in Virginia were not systematically recorded until the Cohabitation Act of 1866 (Thorpe, 2016), it is impossible to know when, where, and how the two met, let alone married. What we do know is that between 1870 and 1880, my great-grandparents purchased a one-acre plot of land and settled in Josephine City. Here, they formed a thriving community with other Black families seeking refuge in Clarke County.

Laying roots in Josephine City, where they would raise their two children, this would be the first instance in which my grandparents Benjamin and Lucy could keep their family intact. This was largely attributed to Josephine providing a relatively safe place for Black families to grow and thrive in the aftermath of slavery (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2015). By 1920, the town became a stronghold for many Black families, offering dwellings that supported community gardening and farming, as well as a church, burial ground, places of commerce, and multiple schools (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2015). Josephine City thus functioned as a localized site of Black self-governance, where survival required the cultivation of knowledge systems independent of the state. Through a shared sense of community interdependence, responsibility, and reliance, our family was able to grow from the vital taproot that grew from the seeds planted by our ancestors, Benjamin and Lucy. In fact, by the time my great-grandmother, Lucy, passed away in 1948, their legacy would be survived by eight grandchildren, 31 great-grandchildren, and 22 great-great grandchildren, all of whom maintained their connection to one another through Josephine.

The descendants of Benjamin and Lucy never forgot where they came from, or the practices that kept them. Their children remained together with their children, and their children did the same. Like their parents and grandparents, later generations of Paige women also maintained multigenerational households where shared community values and knowledge practices maintained the family's connection and sense of aliveness (Quashie, 2021) through food and care. This contextual and localized knowledge developed on Josephine Street continues to be shared from generation to generation as women in my family work together to ensure the survival and continuity. Through the narratives of Queenie and Lainey, we gain deeper insight into the food, values, and knowledge shaped by generations of women who called Josephine

Street their home. And in turn, we learn how these women use these knowledge practices to maintain aliveness intergenerationally.

Josephine Street and Localized Knowledge

Queenie and Lainey are the great-great granddaughters of Benjamin and Lucy Franklin. They grew up in a multigenerational home on Josephine Street where they were raised together with their sibling and cousins and surrounded by their mother, grandmother, and 13 aunts and uncles. As young girls, Josephine was the center of their entire universe. They attended school, here, where they were taught by Black teachers who also lived in the community. They attended church, here, where the annex was named after their grandfather, Benjamin Franklin. But most important to this study, Josephine is also how they learned to produce and prepare food. Some of Queenie and Lainey's most notable cultural memories are food stories that illustrate Josephine's food landscape where knowledge is contextual and deeply localized. I begin with Queenie, the eldest daughter of Thelma, whose fond childhood memories provide insight into this knowledge.

Queenie identified her grandfather Milton, born in 1888, as the main provider for the family during her childhood. In his role as a patriarch, Granddaddy Milton, greatly influenced the production and procurement of food. Queenie shared that "he butchered the hogs...he knew how to do everything..." Queenie's sister, Lainey, affirmed that Granddaddy Milton was the one who supplied "meat and all other things and vegetables." Through multiple conversations with both Queenie and Lainey, I learned that Granddaddy Milton was also responsible for creating gardens out of small patches of land, caring for the chickens, and even catching wild game such as groundhog and rabbit. Through this brief glimpse into Josephine's early food landscape, I began drawing connections between Black foodwork and labor (Williams-Forson, 2006; 2022) and the

self-reliance and self-determination of Black families during the Jim Crow Era (Reese & Garth, 2020).

Reese & Garth (2020) assert that “in many Black communities, it has been accepted that rather than solely depending on the state to alleviate structural inequalities and violence, Black people must instead take care of our own needs, even if that includes food production and distribution” (p. 7). The food stories of the women in my family affirm this assertion as self-reliance and self-determination emerged as important core values that root our knowledge and food-making practices. These values were especially important as my family navigated the Jim Crow Era in rural Virginia. During this time period, my family members were largely confined to low-wage domestic work and manual labor to make a living. But like many other southern Black women, my family members turned to their agricultural and food-making practices to improve their lives as they lived and worked under the structural racism and violence of Jim Crow (Jones-Branch & Petty, 2019; Twitty, 2017; Williams-Forson, 2006).

As Queenie recalled, “back then they made a living butchering hogs and picking apples. We didn’t have these factories and things back in them days...That was our financial [livelihood].” Similarly, Lainey added, “...when you think about it, we were all poor...same background, you know, and everything...they all started in the apple orchard...you talking about hard working.” With no financial assistance or support to supplement low wages, my family members learned to rely on each other to *make a way out of no way*. One way that they achieved this is by collaboratively stewarding food and foodstuffs and developing food-making practices that supported the stretching and preservation of food. Again, the reflections of Queenie and Lainey help us visualize this process.

Queenie vividly remembered her mother, aunts, and grandmother working together in the backyard, butchering chickens to prepare dinner for the family. She shared:

“...we also watched them kill chickens...they would pluck them and get that great big old tub of hot water and scald the chickens...cut the necks off with a hatchet and put them in the hot water...and then you start picking...We made lard from the hogs...fry the chicken in that lard, the best chicken you ever want to taste.”

In this reflection, Queenie describes the process of making fried chicken as one that is collaborative, engaging multiple women in the preparation of dinner. Beyond this context, Queenie also highlights one way that the women steward their food resources. Here, Queenie reveals that the chicken is fried in lard made from “the hogs.” This interdependence reveals that foodwork and labor in my family also function as a collective economic practice structured around survival. In ethically stewarding their resources, waste is minimizing and foodstuff is stretched to nourish the family. Given that the hogs were already provided to them by Granddaddy Milton, lard was produced at no additional cost. As pork was widely consumed and easily accessible to the women in my family, lard could be gathered in surplus and used in common foods that the women would prepare and share with their family.

This process is affirmed by Lainey who remembers her mother and aunt utilizing as much of the hog as possible for sustenance. As Lainey recalled:

“...Mama and Aunt Mazie would clean the chitterlings and everything...Out of that, you would get from the head, they would have the brain that they would cook with eggs...they would get the sausage...what we call scrapple, they call it Ponhaus...pig feet...the lard and everything, and that crisp part will be the crackling and everything, you know.”

The refusal to waste any part of the hog reflects an ethical orientation toward abundance within constraint. As women like Grandma Thelma and Aunt Mazie refused to allow deprivation to determine the terms of living, they worked together to responsibly steward the hogs provided by Granddaddy Milton. We also see that in stretching the resources provided, the women are able to create multiple meals that can be used to feed their families. In doing so, the women were able to ensure there was enough food to feed their families. As Queenie shared, “as we was growing up, she [Mama] took care of all of us. She made sure we had everything we needed.” Lainey shared, “that was the best time...the best good eating.” Despite the times, Queenie and Lainey both share a deep sense of gratitude for the women and foods that kept them satiated. These reflections situate Black women’s foodways as sites of joy, pleasure, and aliveness (Quashie, 2021) rather than sites of deficit and inadequacy (Williams-Forson, 2006). Through the reflections of Queenie and Lainey, I find that there is no shame in survival. Instead, my grandma and great-aunt show demonstrate that even in survival mode, there is room for joy and aliveness. My grandmother, Queenie, especially, demonstrates this as she shares how much she loved and enjoyed participating in food-making and food-preparation practices. Of course, when she was not hiding in the hog pens to avoid going to school.

One of Queenie’s favorite childhood memories was learning how to can vegetables from the garden with her aunt Mazie. In her recollections, she stated:

“Oh, that was easy. I loved doing that...you put the green beans in the jar. We’d snap them and put them in the jar. And then we’d take the wagon and take them up on the hill and put them in the tub and light the fire. She’d keep that fire going like I don’t know what.”

Queenie's reflection emphasizes how much she enjoyed participating in this food-preservation practice with Aunt Mazie. At the same time, her reflection also reveals the importance of food security during this time. As Queenie continued detailing the canning process, she shared:

"...They let them cook all day, and then the next morning they cool off, and you take them out the tub...and then turn them upside down on the table, and that's how they seal...you could keep them year after year because they're sealed. See, we had a cellar...and you kept food downstairs in the cellar."

Canning served as one food preservation method that supported food security for the women in my family ensuring food reserves from year to year.

Being able to have food safely stored is important because it ensured the women had food access from season to season, in times of scarcity, and when food could not be grown from the land. Queenie recalled:

"When we had a garden...we would take the potatoes and put them down in the cellar. You take them and lay them down on this plastic thing, and you spread them all out...onions, too. And they keep all winter long."

Here, we see that food preservation methods were helpful in providing food security through months where the women would not be able to rely on their garden to provide food. This forward-thinking is something that the women actively engaged in their day to day lives to ensure that food would be secured not only in the present, but in the future as well. Given that the women had no access to electricity until "the modern days," and that all of the foods they ate were produced and procured by the family, food preservation was absolutely necessary for nourishment and survival. Queenie recalled:

“We didn’t have electricity...we didn’t have an electric stove or nothing like that, and we never had a Frigidaire or refrigerator. We had an ice box, and we kept food cold in the shed... and we would get ice every other day to keep the food cold... That’s how we lived.”

Importantly, I draw attention to Queenie’s final sentence in the quote above: *that’s how we lived*. This declaration is a stark reminder that being able to maintain self-reliance, self-determination, and food security was the difference between life or death for my family. Queenie’s words are also a symbol of my family’s resilience. Through this interpretation, I find that life and aliveness (Quashie, 2021) would not have been possible without the emphasis on the survival of the family as collective, illustrated by Queenie’s use of “we.” And so, I situate this dedication to the survival of the family collective as the ultimate value that ties the food stories shared in this section together.

Throughout the narratives shared in this section, self-reliance, self-determination, and food security, were not achieved by individual merit. But rather, through collaborative efforts to procure, produce, and steward food for the nourishment and sustenance of the family. In this way, hogs become a culinary staple and cost effective way to feed an entire family and gardens the primary method for subsistence farming. Canning vegetables becomes a means for ensuring there is enough food to last through winter. Hidden beneath these methods of food preparation and procurement are the value and knowledge systems that made them possible. Through the foodwork and labor of elders like Granddaddy Milton, Grandma Thelma, and Aunt Mazie, we gain insight into the values that motivate how food is created and how it moves through the family. What remains more implicit is how these values shape the knowledge that is created and shared intergenerationally. What emerges across these narratives is not simply food procurement

and preparation, but a coherent value system in action, binding survival, interdependence, and aliveness (Quashie, 2021) into everyday practice.

To make sense of this process, I return to the reflections of Queenie. As Queenie often watched her elders and eventually began participating in the process of procuring and preparing food, she was actively involved in engaging the contextual and localized knowledge of her family. As the narratives in this section all occur during the Jim Crow era, Queenie's knowledge of food and food-making as a girl are all shaped by the *how* and *why* that informed the way her elders navigated Josephine's food landscape. Here, she learned how food is procured, by growing it from the land, hunting wild game, and raising and caring for livestock that could also be slaughtered for meat. She also learned how to stretch and preserve food to ensure food security. But most importantly, these food practices taught her that this is how *we* survive. We learn that the contextual and localized knowledge of my family is rooted in a specific sociocultural context in which their food processes illuminate what knowledge they value and why.

Throughout the narratives shared in this section, self-reliance, self-determination, and food security were not achieved through individual merit, but through collective labor and shared responsibility. Hogs became culinary staples not only because they were cost-effective, but because they could be transformed into multiple meals through the women's knowledge of the animal and shared food labor. Gardens became sites of subsistence farming and ecological sustainability. Canning and cellar storage became practices of preservation, ensuring nourishment across seasons and uncertainty. Beneath these material practices lies a coherent value forged under enslavement and Jim Crow, one that prioritizes collective survival. The

contextual and localized knowledge developed on Josephine Street reveals that what my family valued most was not merely food itself, but the continuity of the family unit.

In this way, food-making emerges as both epistemic practice and ethical orientation, teaching each generation not only how to survive, but why this knowledge of survival must be shared. Taken together, the narratives in this arc demonstrate that knowledge among the women in my family is not transmitted through formal instruction or written documentation. Rather, it is produced and sustained through embodied engagement with food practices, relational proximity to elders, and sensory forms of knowing that emerge through repeated participation in shared food spaces.

Arc II: Knowledge Transfer Across Generations

As the women in my family reflect on treasured family foods they are transported back to the food spaces that were once filled with their elders. In their recollections the women emphasize close proximity and relationality, as these food spaces often engage multigenerational women gathering and preparing meals together. The data shows that this food-making process is often led by elders, who hold key knowledge on how to prepare traditional family meals and recipes. I find that as younger generations participate in the food-making process with their elders, they gain key knowledge and insight on how to cook cultural foods and maintain culinary traditions. These data findings led me to my understanding of intergenerational knowledge transmission.

I conceptualize intergenerational knowledge transmission as the process in which knowledge is passed from generation to generation, in this case, through food. I understand intergenerational knowledge transmission as the engagement of the past, present, and future through the knowledge of my family's ancestors and elders. In my family, this knowledge is

commonly engaged through food and food-making, as the women often rely on lessons learned from previous generations to recreate meals and maintain traditions that have sustained the family. I find that this knowledge is ultimately rooted in survival and cultural perpetuation as the women use food as tool to sustain care networks and familial connection. Understanding intergenerational knowledge transmission as an epistemic process is important because I view intergenerational knowledge itself as an alternative form of knowledge that is often suppressed, taken for granted, and devalued (Collins, 1989).

As Collins (1989) asserts, the alternative knowledges of Black women are often marginalized through “Eurocentric masculinist knowledge-validation systems” (p. 178) that are methodologically inadequate to articulate and evaluate the knowledge and standpoints of Black women. At the same time, the women in my study reflect that, at times, we as Black women can also take this knowledge for granted. This is not to conflate or falsely equate the structural power of Black women and men, white and non-white, but rather, it is to suggest that when you are exposed to something that becomes normal and ordinary, it can become increasingly difficult to appreciate its value (Zajonc, 1968). Simply put, *you don’t know what you have until it’s gone*.

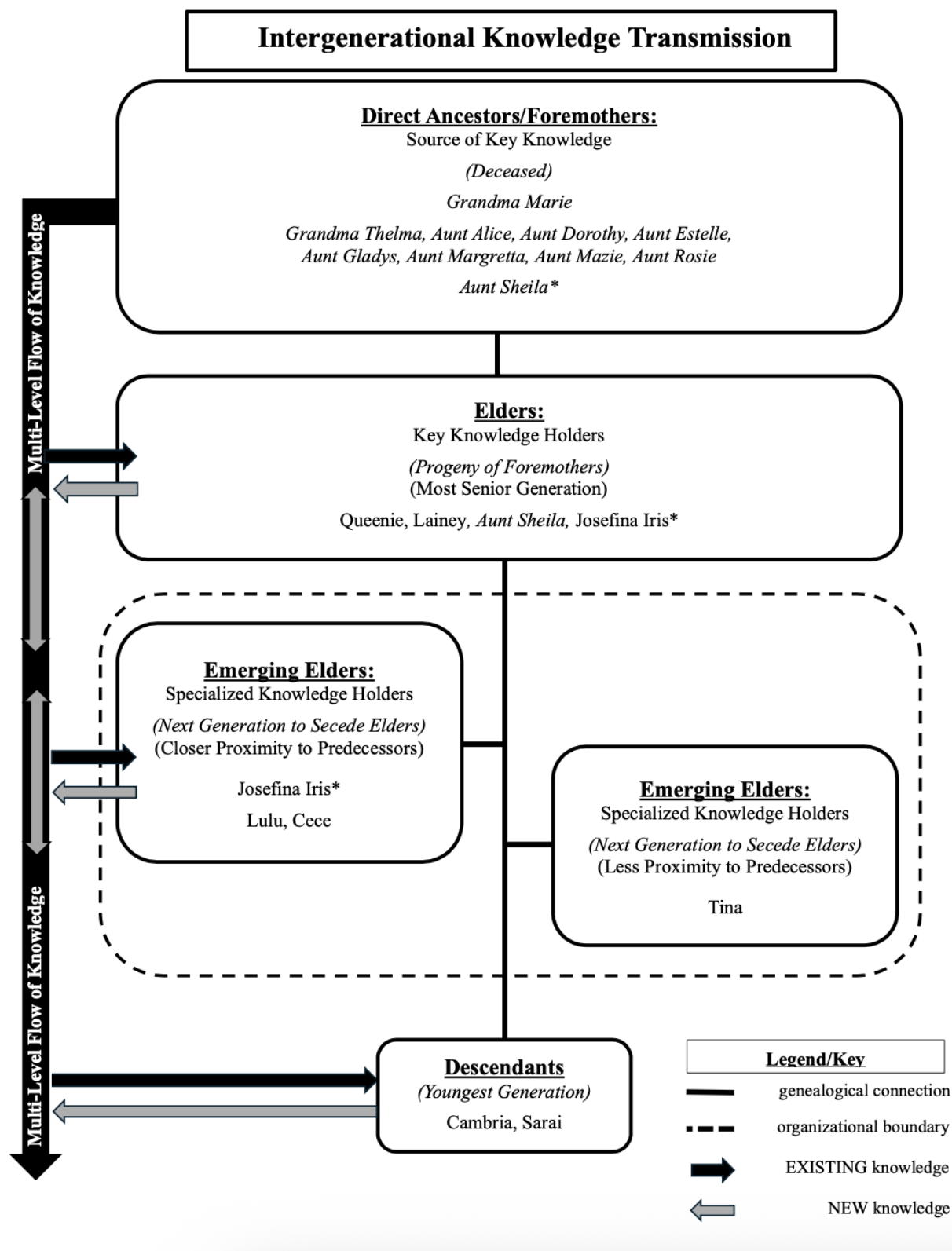
At times in the data collection process, the women shared their food stories and memories of elders who have passed on through immense feelings of grief, loss, and regret. And yet, through these unresolved feelings they often expressed being comforted by the knowledge and foods of their ancestors that they held onto. I find that these experiences shape how existing and emerging elders then interact with the younger and upcoming generations of our family. The data shows that existing and emerging elders began changing the method in which knowledge is shared and transmitted, often engaging more explicit instruction that is easier to preserve and share widely with younger and upcoming generations. Through this process, the women show

and reinforce intergenerational knowledge transmission as a means for the perpetuation and continuation of the family.

In this section, I analyze intergenerational knowledge transmission through a multi-level, hierarchical, flow of knowledge that captures how knowledge moves and transforms from generation to generation through food. At the primary level, key knowledge is held by elders who have developed expertise and mastery firsthand through actively participating in the food-making process with ancestors. Through the data, I define key knowledge as knowledge that is fundamental and essential in the successful preparation of traditional family foods. At the secondary level, women who are next in the line of succession to emerge as elders are the secondhand recipients of this food knowledge that is validated by older generations. These women gain proficiency through preparing food with elders who are still living. At the tertiary level, knowledge is transmitted to younger generations through close proximity to emerging and existing elders. Here, knowledge transmission often becomes more explicit as older generations become more open to the writing and recording of recipes to facilitate long-lasting knowledge transfer preservation.

At each level, intergenerational knowledge transmission takes on a different purpose and sense of urgency for the women in my family. What remains consistent throughout each level, however, is the shared responsibility of older and younger generations to preserve the food-making practices and traditions of the family. The data shows that this process requires older generations to be willing to share their knowledge and younger generations to be willing to spend time with elders to receive this knowledge. Taken together, my multi-level organization of the flow of knowledge in my family, explicates how intergenerational knowledge is transmitted through food and food-making practices is used to maintain our family.

Figure 3
Intergenerational Flow of Knowledge Diagram



Primary

The primary level in the flow of knowledge diagram consists of women in my family who I consider to be elders and key knowledge holders. These elders were raised by earlier generations of women in our family who taught subsequent generations how to prepare food. My family's food stories and oral histories support my understanding of early generations of women as foremothers and epistemic authorities who serve as a foundational source of knowledge. Only one to three generations removed from enslavement, these women passed on their knowledge of survival through food-making practices that allowed them to navigate structural limitations. In my articulation of the flow of intergenerational knowledge, I do not consider early generations of my family to be primary elders. As these women have transitioned and are no longer here physically, they are highly regarded as ancestors who live on through the knowledge they imparted to their daughters and granddaughters. In the flow of intergenerational knowledge in my family, ancestors are the source of knowledge, while elders serve as the closest living stewards of this knowledge. In this way, I view the transmission of intergenerational knowledge in my family as a highly spiritual process, one in which my elders will one day transition and join the women who once fed and cared for them.

In my flow of knowledge diagram, elders are positioned directly below my ancestors suggesting that they are closest to the main source of knowledge. This positioning indicates that they are the most knowledgeable among the living women in my family when it comes to our food-making practices and traditions. Through the data, I found that this mastery and expertise was developed by spending extensive time with earlier generations of women in our family where close proximity and relationality supported the transfer of knowledge (Roche et al., 2022; Torre, 2008; Wei et al., 2011). To better understand these seasoned experts, I analyze how key

knowledge was transmitted to my elders by earlier generations of women in our family. I trace this epistemic process throughout the childhood of my elders and into their adulthood, both of which occur against the backdrop of the Jim Crow Era and Civil Rights Movement.

I begin with a reflection from Lulu, who affirms our ancestors as a main source of knowledge in the food-making process. This context is important because it provides a starting point for the flow of knowledge in our family. Lulu explained:

“I think it would be Thelma and her sisters, because you know, they were very close...So I think it would start with them...[and] from their mother...just watching them [earlier generations], you know and then they [elders] learn. You would have to be around them to know...”

In her reflection, Lulu identifies ancestors like her grandma, Thelma, and great-grandma, Marie, as the starting point for understanding our family’s food-making practices and traditions. She positions these earlier generations as the women from whom our elders learned. As Lulu explains that the women “were very close” and that “you would have to be around them to know,” her words indicate that intergenerational knowledge transmission in our family depends on sustained proximity and relationality with those who hold key knowledge.

Lulu’s identification of Grandma Thelma’s and Grandma Marie’s generation affirms these older generations of women in my family as authoritative sources of knowledge. Given that our elders learned from the earlier generations of women who raised them, I also consider whether the learning process was similar for my twice great-grandmother Marie’s generation. Although I assume it likely was similar, it would have been interesting to continue tracing my family’s knowledge and food-making practices another generation to find how these cultural practices survived enslavement and Reconstruction. I did not have the opportunity to sit down

with my grandma Marie, or ask these questions to her daughter Thelma, who may have been able to provide further insight into what she remembers from her elders of the time. Due to this gap in knowledge, my “starting point” in the flow of intergenerational knowledge is limited to the knowledge that has survived. This starting point represents an early tension in my understanding of the movement of knowledge in my family as epistemic ruptures challenge and restrict how knowledge flows from generation to generation.

From the data, I understand epistemic ruptures as breaks, gaps, and interruptions to the family’s intergenerational knowledge transmission process. I see these ruptures as diagnoses, events, and shifts that require the women to adapt to preserve the knowledge of their elders and avoid epistemic loss. Most commonly in my family, this happens when elders age, get sick, or pass away, before they are able to share knowledge of their foods and food-making practices with younger generations. I revisit this tension in the next section as I examine the epistemic durability of intergenerational knowledge in my family when our elders transition. For now, I return to Lulu and her reflections of our ancestors.

As Lulu was cared for and fed by earlier generations of women in our family, with whom she spent a considerable amount of time, I consider her to be a reliable witness to the intergenerational transmission of knowledge from earlier generations to our elders today. In describing the knowledge transfer process, she again emphasizes close proximity and relationality:

“You gotta learn it with them...or you just don’t get it...they never wrote anything down. It’s all in their head of how they made stuff. So, we can’t tell you what you do, put this much, that much in it, because we just don’t know. Unless you were around them all the time while they were cooking, you just don’t know.”

Lulu's assertion that the knowledge of earlier generations could not be learned unless you "learn it with them" or "were around them all the time" is important because it further emphasizes that our elders are the most knowledgeable because they are the ones who were the closest to our ancestors. This closeness is a main distinguishing factor between women who are elders and the next generation of women who will follow. As Lulu articulates, "we can't tell you what you do...because we just don't know" she is referring to her generation of women in the family whose time spent with earlier generations was not as extensive as the time spent by elders. Because our elders were the ones who were "around them all the time," cooking and preparing food with earlier generations, they are the ones who received this knowledge directly from our ancestors. To affirm this finding, I turn to the narratives of elders, Queenie and Lainey, the last of few remaining elders, who further contextualize the intergenerational knowledge transmission process.

Lainey, the daughter of Thelma, grew up on Josephine where she lived until she graduated from high school and moved to Washington, D.C. When she moved to Washington, D.C. she took her knowledge of food and family with her. She fondly remembered her aunt Alice, giving her a cookbook to take to her new home so she could continue experimenting with cooking. She also recalled learning from different elders in her family, confirming that the key knowledge she and other elders hold, was passed down from those who came before them. She shared:

"You know, to me it's all about family...cooking and everything you learn from different members of the family...I was close to everybody. What mama couldn't do, Rosie did, or somebody did, Aunt Mazie did...life was good. That's where we get everything from..."

Lainey's emphasis on being close to her family as she explains learning from elders reiterates that the women view proximity and relationality as an important part of the intergenerational knowledge transmission process. Through this closeness, Lainey learned that knowledge was specialized within the family, with each woman holding a distinct role in the food-making process. This not only shows that the women were interdependent but also that they maintained an organized system of shared food labor, evident in how the women shared responsibilities based on the tasks each woman could perform.

After deeper introspection, however, what stood out to me was Lainey's declaration that "life was good." I view this statement as evidence of Lainey's appreciation for the care and stability that shaped her upbringing. As previously articulated, Lainey was raised on Josephine Street in a multigenerational home with her mother, grandmother, and aunts, where food-making was a shared responsibility. Her relative satisfaction suggests that as a young girl, she was well cared for by her elders. This indicates that the knowledge-making practices of earlier generations of women in my family were nourishing and sustaining for Lainey, even when material conditions were harsh (Mahaffey, 2025). This acknowledgement is important given what was at stake for the women during this time period.

As discussed in the *contextual and localized knowledge* section, the food-making practices of earlier generations in my family were the difference between sustenance and deprivation during the Jim Crow Era. Lainey further reinforces this claim as she suggests that her mother and aunt learning how to cook was a matter of survival. She shared, "Mama and Alice must have watched grandma, because...grandma couldn't read or write...But that's how they learned... if they were going to eat." Lainey's emphasis on *if* reflects the precarity surrounding food access that informs why knowing how to procure and prepare food was of the utmost

importance during this time. Access to food was not a fundamental right afforded to these women and so, they were largely limited to the foods they could grow and produce in their communities (Garth & Reese, 2020). Learning how to cook and prepare food, therefore meant learning how to survive for the women in my family.

This claim is further supported by Lainey's eldest sister, Queenie, who reflected on the process of foraging for wild asparagus and fieldcress with her elders. Queenie recalled:

“My grandmother would love asparagus, the wild asparagus...and you would go up the railroad track and pick em... We knew when the train was coming. We knew when to go. The train came at a certain time, and you could see them [wild asparagus]...and fieldcress...you can tell that too...but back then that's all they had...you would go up and down the fields, you just had to know the field to go and spot them.”

As Queenie shares, “back then that's all they had,” she further reinforces precarity due to limited food access. In spending time foraging with earlier generations in our family, Queenie was actively learning food procurement strategies that allowed the women to meet their food needs. Her repeated declaration of “we knew” signals that this is no longer only the knowledge of earlier generations, but Queenie's knowledge as well. This collective and shared knowledge also shows how the women were able to transform their environment into a food landscape. The knowledge of what wild plants could be used for food provisions, and where these plants could be found, allowed the women to engage the land, and the food resources it provided, as a source of nourishment. This example confirms that the knowledge transmitted by earlier generations to elders in my family is rooted in survival. Queenie's role as an active participant in the foraging

process indicates that knowledge transmission is also a means for sustaining shared labor and collective responsibility among the women.

As Lainey recalled, Queenie began cooking as a young girl where she learned by watching their mother in the kitchen. As Queenie continued to grow and learn in the kitchen she began taking over more responsibility becoming one of the key cooks in her family. Lainey confirmed this sharing that “[Queenie] did the most... she did the cooking. Mama relied on her. Because I remember mama saying when [Queenie] left...she said, ‘my ace...there’s my ace... My ace is gone.’ Yeah, Mama said that!” At this point in time, Queenie is now 18 years old. Lainey’s reflection indicates not only a jump in time, but also an increase in Queenie’s knowledge proficiency as she is now a main contributor to the food-making process and not just a participant or observer. Lainey’s reflection suggests that as Queenie gained more responsibility procuring and preparing food for her family, she alleviated her mother of some of her own food laboring responsibilities. This is evidenced by Queenie’s mother, Thelma, relying on her to take over cooking responsibilities.

What also stands out to me in Lainey’s reflection, is her mother’s reaction to Queenie leaving home. As Lainey recalls her mother stating that her “ace is gone,” she reinforces her mother’s reliance on Queenie. This is demonstrated by her repeated use of the word *ace*. In contemporary understandings of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), ace typically denotes a close companionship or friendship (Smitherman 1994). In this context, however, ace affirms Queenie’s dependability and prominence as someone who could share responsibilities in the family. According to Queenie, she earned this name because she was “the pick of the litter” and “mama’s favorite” as she always helped her mother in the kitchen. And so, her name suggests that not only was it given based on her closeness to her mother but also because her role

as a contributor to the family's food system was invaluable. Her nickname also indicates that Queenie's knowledge of cooking and food preparation had been validated by one of the most prominent elders of her time, her mother. This confirms her epistemic authority within the family structure, positioning Queenie's food knowledge as high-ranking, due to her mastery of cooking that has been validated by older generations.

In reflecting on her time spent with her mother in the kitchen, Queenie noted "you don't forget it" demonstrating how she views the epistemic durability of the intergenerational knowledge shared with her. Although Queenie left home at 18, she only lived 20 minutes away from her mother and loved ones. This distance was short enough that Queenie was only a bus ride away. As she explained, "I went home almost every change I got. I went home every chance I got...my roots are in Berryville." This was especially important on holidays like Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, when Queenie's entire family would gather in her childhood home. As Queenie shared:

"We used to go down to Mama's Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas, everything...because on the holiday you bring everything to the table you know how to cook. You have your everyday living, but when the holidays come, you fix everything...that comes from way, way, back...I think it just came up the line, just goes way back..."

Even after moving away and starting her only family, we see that Queenie never forgot her roots and continued to maintain closeness with her family. In her description of holiday celebrations at her childhood home, she sheds light on how intergenerational knowledge shapes tradition. Here, Queenie differentiates everyday food-making practices from holiday food-making traditions.

Through her comparison of “everyday living” to the food spreads of the holidays, she shares that on these special occasions holiday foods are prepared in abundance.

As Queenie asserted that this is a practice that comes from “way, way, back,” initially I thought she meant earlier generations of women in our family. When I asked Queenie what she meant by “way, way, back” she shared that these food practices and traditions followed us from Africa and then “came up the line.” She answered:

“Honestly, I think it came from Africa...because the families [during enslavement] used to work the fields together, they ate together, they sung together, they went to church. They would hum when they were working. They were all close, even though the masters owned them, they still was close.”

Queenie’s reflection was striking for me because she attributes the cultural knowledge and practices that shape how and why our family gathers around food to our African ancestry. Her assertion that “it came from Africa” reflects a diasporic understanding of continuity that resists dominant narratives that suggest our knowledge and cultural practices were totally ruptured during enslavement (Raboteau, 1978; Stuckey, 1987). In conversation with Queenie’s above quote about gathering with her family for holidays, this reflection on the origins of our food traditions, marks a turning point in which we see that food is not only used for survival, but also as a tool to maintain connection to the family. Stated otherwise, what once ensured the physiological survival of the family later ensured its relational survival. This is especially important to consider as Queenie’s generation left their home on Josephine en masse, often for economic security, in the post-Civil Rights Era. As Queenie shared, “We all expanded, every last one of us when somewhere.” With the family now spread out, with some members well beyond

the boundaries of Josephine, gathering around food for the holidays became institutionalized as a significant cultural practice to maintain connection to our family and roots.

Together, the narratives of both Queenie and Lainey position these women as primary elders who spent extensive time with earlier generations in our family who used food to ensure survival in rural Virginia during the Jim Crow Era. Through the lessons of older generations, the women learned key knowledge about how to maintain access to food and share food-making responsibilities to ensure the nourishment of the family. As the women aged and times began to change, this knowledge was then transformed into knowledge used to keep the family together when the women were no longer in the same close physical proximity to the elders they grew up with. It is because of this knowledge that we know not only our family's history, but the knowledge and food-making practices that have sustained us for generations. For this reason, women like, Queenie and Lainey, have been cemented as elders who hold the key knowledge that undergird this study.

Secondary

The secondary level in the flow of knowledge diagram consists of the next generation of women in my family who will succeed our most senior generations of elders. Based on this line of succession, I consider these women to be emerging elders as they are next in line to become prominent elders in our family. As they follow behind the most senior generation of elders, their positioning at the secondary level reflects a difference in the depth and scope of their knowledge. This difference is largely due to generational differences in lived experience, responsibility, and food access. The data suggests that despite these differences, emerging elders hold advanced and deeply specialized knowledge of specific foods, recipes, and traditions learned through spending intentional time with elders. The word intentional is important because, for emerging elders, time

spent with senior generations and the elders of their time was less about collectively sharing responsibility to ensure physiological survival, and more about safeguarding family foods and traditions to ensure cultural continuity.

Within this secondary level, the women are further organized into two categorical groups that identify their proximity to their predecessors. Emerging elders like Josefina Iris, Lulu, and Cece are identified as women who were closer in proximity to earlier generations of women in our family. Conversely, Tina is identified as an emerging elder who had less proximity to these women. This distinction is analytically important because the data shows that proximity shaped not only access to knowledge, but also the timing, method, and motivation of knowledge transfer. My emerging elders grew up during a time when many of our elders and direct ancestors were still living. Previous generations could still impart knowledge directly to them, even if the structure of transmission no longer mirrored earlier forms of shared food labor. And yet, access to elders was uneven. As a result, the knowledge transmission process varied across women, producing differentiated pathways of intergenerational knowledge transfer.

The data shows that for emerging elders, the method and motivation for intergenerational knowledge transmission was based on each woman's physical and relational proximity to previous generations. For example, as a child, Tina grew up in Winchester where she had less proximity to earlier generations of women in our family outside of summers and holidays spent on Josephine Street. So, she learned the family's food-making practices as an adult. Her distance meant learning later in life, as an adult. However, women like Lulu and Cece grew up on Josephine Street where they were constantly surrounded by their elders. For them, the knowledge transmission process began in childhood and continued through immersion. I indicate this relationship in my diagram by separating the emerging elder section into two smaller categories

based on close proximity to predecessors and less proximity to predecessors. This is not to suggest that one pathway produces more valuable knowledge, but rather to demonstrate that multiple pathways for knowledge transfer can coexist within my family.

Importantly, in my articulation of intergenerational knowledge transmission, I name Josefina Iris as an emerging elder, although her name also appears in my diagram alongside elders such as Queenie and Lainey. Josefina Iris is the youngest daughter of my Grandma Thelma and the youngest sister of Queenie, Lainey, and Aunt Sheila. Generationally, she stands between her older sisters and her nieces, Lulu, Cece, and Tina. She was born early enough to spend extensive time with earlier generations of women in our family, yet because of the age gap between her and her sisters, she was too young to fully inhabit the food-making responsibilities of their time. Generationally and experientially, she aligns more closely with Lulu and Cece.

At the same time, as the youngest daughter of Grandma Thelma, she holds the respect and cultural authority of an elder. For this reason, I position her name with her sisters in the diagram, while also placing it slightly higher than the other emerging elders to reflect her liminal position. Her placement symbolizes a generational hinge. She bridges generations, carrying memories from the older generations while growing into elderhood alongside those who follow. Due to her close proximity and extensive time spent with both key knowledge holders and sources of knowledge, her positioning reflects her journey of becoming an elder.

As the earlier generations of women in our family have now passed on, we now rely on the knowledge of our remaining elders to maintain our food-making practices. In the previous section, these elders demonstrated that knowledge transmission was strengthened by close proximity and connection to key knowledge holders (Roche et al., 2022; Torre, 2008; Wei et al.,

2011). However, for many of the women identified as emerging elders, the same closeness was not always possible.

This generation of women came of age during in the mid-20th century, a period marked by the decline of Black multigenerational households (Mahaffey, 2025). Unlike their predecessors, whose multigenerational living arrangements enabled shared responsibilities, labor, and knowledge exchange daily (Mahaffey, 2025), many elders moved toward a nuclear family model upon leaving home. Without sustained family support, elders facing low-wages and limited job security often worked long hours, and, at times, multiple jobs, to support their families (Bremner, 1992; Clergé, 2023; Jones, 1985; White, 1999). Most tragically, emerging elders also experienced the sudden and unexpected losses of prominent women in older generations. As a result, knowledge transmission between elders and emerging elders differed significantly from that of earlier generations.

The transfer of intergenerational knowledge required emerging elders in my family to constantly adapt and change their methods for acquiring and preserving knowledge. I attribute this to repeated moments of epistemic rupture such as, unexpected death or sickness, health diagnoses, and disappearing food landscapes that have endangered our family's knowledge. Importantly, my conceptualization of epistemic rupture differs from Bachelard's (1938) conceptualization of philosophical breaks in scientific reasoning. I view epistemic rupture as significant turning points in my family's history that alter the flow of knowledge from generation to generation. The data shows that these epistemic interruptions require the women in my family to rework their methods of knowledge transfer to protect and preserve knowledge vulnerable to loss and devastation. And yet the emerging elders in my family do whatever it takes to keep this knowledge alive, so that our family lives on, and our ancestors live on through our traditions.

Although the turn of the 21st century has been marked by repeated lessons in saying goodbye, my family continues to endure. For our sisters. For our aunties. For our mothers. For our grandmothers. But most importantly, for the future. As my emerging elders share their food stories and memories through vulnerability and strength, they demonstrate how intergenerational knowledge transmission endures despite disruption. In doing so, they reveal that intergenerational knowledge is not a passive inheritance, but an active epistemic commitment to reworking, recreating, and safeguarding the traditions that have held our family together.

Epistemic Rupture is Inevitable. Epistemic Loss is Not.

I begin with a reflection of my great-aunt Sheila, the younger sister of Queenie and Lainey, and the daughter of my (great) Grandma Thelma. My Aunt Sheila was around 13 years old when her older sisters, Queenie and Lainey left home and started their own families. Aunt Sheila remained on Josephine Street, even as an adult, where she would become one of—if not *the*—best cooks in our family. As Queenie affirmed, “nobody could compare to her cooking.”

My great-Aunt Sheila began her cooking journey in the Benjamin Franklin Annex of Zion Baptist Church, where she prepared church meals side by side with her elders. As Lulu recalled, “Aunt Estelle, Sheila, your Grandma Thelma, used to help in the kitchen and Mr. Bob Reynolds down the road.” In Zion’s multigenerational kitchen, Aunt Sheila learned through sustained proximity, observation, and experimentation. Lainey confirmed this as she shared:

“...I think after watching and then experimenting, Sheila was a cook. When she finally joined church, she stayed over in the kitchen, cooking. Like the foundations and everything...the veggies...the carbs...by watching. You know that’s all I can say, experimenting and watching and everything...till she made her cooking perfected.”

It is important to note that my Aunt Sheila's cooking did not become "perfected" in isolation. Rather, her mastery was developed through the training she received while working alongside her elders who modeled foundational techniques. Her culinary expertise was produced within her community and not apart from it, where proximity to her elders facilitated knowledge transmission, and repetition solidified her expertise.

As her mothers and aunts aged, Aunt Sheila stepped in as the primary cook for holidays in our family. As her younger sister Josefina Iris recalled, "pretty much Sheila cooked everything except the turkey or the ham or the sauerkraut..." Her knowledge of traditional family foods and food-making practices was trusted and recognized as authoritative. In this way, Aunt Sheila became a key knowledge holder in our family as she was one of the final elders to maintain direct connection to earlier generations of women whose food-making practices sustained our family. And while she would have been a perfect participant for this study, I did not have the opportunity to sit down and talk to her about the foods she graciously prepared for our family and all whom she cared for. I would have liked to ask her about cooking in the kitchen with Grandma Thelma, and how she learned to perfect her deviled eggs that I looked forward to every Easter. But in 2014, we lost my Aunt Sheila to a valiant fight with cancer.

My Aunt Sheila's unexpected passing meant more than the loss of a beloved member. It also meant the loss of direct proximity to a key knowledge holder and elder in our family. This epistemic rupture marked a shift in how food-making practices would be learned and maintained by emerging elders. Like the women in earlier generations, Aunt Sheila never recorded her recipes. Without recipes or direct proximity, emerging elders in my family, like Cece, began engaging alternative pathways for knowledge transfer. As a result, they women developed different adaptations and workarounds for recreating the food dishes of their elders. As Lulu

explained, “...when you say recipe, you can’t imitate their recipes because they never wrote nothing down...everyone is different in how they make it, but they’re still good...”

When Lulu states, “but they’re still good,” she offers an evaluation of food dishes recreated by emerging elders in the absence of our elders and recipes that were both tacit and embodied. Although Lulu believes emerging elders cannot recreate food dishes that taste identical to those prepared by Aunt Sheila, and other family members who have passed, variance between recipes does not always indicate failure. Her use of “still good,” in her evaluation suggests that variance is accepted if the food is prepared well and tastes close to its reference point. At the same time, there are certain food dishes that she does not believe can ever be recreated by anyone else because their preparation is associated with one specific person. For instance, Lulu shared that “someone can probably make deviled eggs, but they won’t be as good as Sheila’s.” What seemed paradoxical initially, reminded me of the emotions and memories that are deeply embedded in food (Lupton, 1994).

As the women in my family have such intimate relationships with food and family, it can be hard to separate their identity from the foods that they have mastered as they nourish and care for their loved ones (Liburd, 2003). This is not to romanticize the experiences of Black women who have been historically marginalized as caretakers and foodmakers (Nettles-Barcelón et al., 2015). Rather, it is to posit that the foods we have gathered around serve as examples of how much we are loved by the women who have fed us. This is especially true for our elders who have passed on but continue to live through our shared foods and memories.

Beyond this labor of love, many of the women in my family also take great pride in being the only person who knows how to prepare a dish or the one who makes it the best. Like my mother and grandmother who “argue over who makes the best potato salad,” as Lulu shared.

When I think of it this way, I see Lulu's statement, "but they won't be as good as Sheila's," not as pessimistic or doubtful, but as a reflection of the deep reverence she has for her aunt. No one can make Aunt Sheila's deviled eggs because no one is her, and no one can ever compare to her. Not only as a cook, but also as a sister, mother, godmother, aunt, and grandmother. This tension shows that even if recipes are materially reproducible, they may not carry the same symbolic meaning. This shows that the evaluation of the recreation of recipes is not just about taste, but it's also about presence and relationality. From this perspective, I view the recreation of family foods and recipes that once belonged to our ancestors as veneration practices that must be performed with care, reverence, and intentionality as my emerging elders strive to safeguard the legacies of our ancestors through food.

The data shows that the reworking of intergenerational knowledge is necessary for the continuation of family food and food-making traditions across generations. As times change, so does our access to specific memories, ingredients, and techniques, impacting how recipes are created and recreated from generation to generation (De Backer, 2013; Gutiérrez et al., 2024; van-Kersteren & Evans, 2020). Based on this understanding, I assume that even if Aunt Sheila were here today to directly teach emerging elders how to make her recipes, these foods would still come out slightly different from earlier versions made (De Backer, 2013). Therefore, I understand variances in recipes to be normal and expected, and adaptations to methods of knowledge transmission that once required close proximity to be necessary for continuity (Mazzonetto et al., 2020).

While the epistemic rupture of intergenerational knowledge transmission is inevitable as elders age and pass on, the narratives of emerging elders demonstrate that epistemic loss is not. To affirm this claim, I turn to Aunt Sheila's daughter, Cece, who reflected on the foods once

prepared by her mother that she now prepares today. As Cece recalled that she “never learned any recipes” while her mother was living, her reflection reveals how intergenerational knowledge can be reworked to recreate family foods in the absence of elders and documented recipes. Cece explained:

“...sweet potatoes... beans and weenies. Those are really the only things that I *fix*, fix, of mom’s...she cooked so much and so many things, but I think those are my favorites, so I paid attention kind of to that...I don’t know if they’re exactly like hers, but I think they’re close...close enough. And I mean...there’s no recipe. I just, you know, put in and taste.”

Cece’s repetition of *fix* suggests her comfort level and level of confidence in preparing Aunt Sheila’s renditions of sweet potatoes and beans and weenies. This indicates that Cece feels she has developed proficiency in making these two dishes. Although Cece attributes her proficiency to paying attention to her mother making these dishes, her reflection suggests that she has also had to rely on memories of her mother’s cooking process to rework the knowledge she no longer has direct access to. This marks an important shift away from the transmission of knowledge through observation and close proximity to elders as Cece now relies on her memory to inform her food-making process. As Cece explained, “there’s no recipe,” yet she still recalled what ingredients to put in each dish and what they should taste like for it to be considered “close enough.” Given that Aunt Sheila is no longer here physically, Cece engages her mother through her food memories to recall what ingredients to use as well as her senses to inform how much to add. Through this process, Cece was able to reconnect to the knowledge of her mother to recreate two of her favorite dishes despite epistemic rupture.

Cece also confirms the claim that slight variations between older recipes and new ones are acceptable, as long as taste is not sacrificed. This is confirmed when she states, “I don’t know if they’re exactly like hers, but I think they’re close...close enough.” To evaluate what constitutes “close enough” Cece’s memories of her mother’s cooking combine with her senses, supporting the transfer of knowledge even though Aunt Sheila is not physically present. In this way, Cece’s reflection supports that memory can be an important conduit in the transmission of intergenerational knowledge. In our conversation together, Cece later revealed that recipes and food-making practices adapted by emerging elders are also evaluated by senior generations still living. For example, when Cece learned how to make Aunt Sheila’s potato salad recipe, she was taught by my Aunt Sheila’s, late cousin, Mart, who cooked with her in the church kitchen until she passed away. As Cece shared, “mom and Mart, they did a lot of cooking together...Both of them were good cooks...I guess cooking in the kitchen and I think, like with Mart, like her dad, Uncle Marcellus, and Mr. Reynolds, they used to cook in the kitchen.” This context establishes Mart as important source of knowledge for Cece as her close proximity to Aunt Sheila and her culinary expertise combine to supplement the knowledge that Cece did not have the chance to learn from her mother. As a result of this knowledge, Cece was able to learn her mother’s famous potato salad recipe after her passing.

In reflecting on the quality and taste of her potato salad, she shares that she has not received any complaints:

“...she was known for her potato salad and them deviled eggs, and that fried chicken. I miss those days...I never learned how to make her potato salad. But Mart showed me how to make potato salad, so I think it’s pretty good. I ain’t had no complaints...”

Cece's proficiency is further validated through collective evaluation. Her statement that she "ain't had no complaints" reflects a familial epistemic confirmation. In alignment with Collins' (1990) articulation of collective knowledge validation processes, knowledge authority in my family is not individually declared but socially affirmed. Aunt Sheila was "known for potato salad" not only because everyone always wanted her to make it, but because the family as a collective recognized her expertise. Similarly, Cece's recreation of her mother's potato salad gains legitimacy not solely through her own confidence but through acceptance from her community. In this context, knowledge is affirmed and validated through collective consensus.

Cece's continued emphasis on the popularity of her mother's potato salad suggests that she considers this information to be an important part of her mother's legacy and our overall family history. In addition to phrases like, "I miss those days," this insight reveals the emotional weight of epistemic rupture on the women in my family. As food strengthens our connection as a family, the loss of family members and the potential loss of the foods that once brought us together can feel like a loss of self (Counihan & Van Esterik, 2013; Lupton, 1996). Yet Cece's eventual learning of her mother's potato salad recipe through Mart reflects not a reversal of rupture, but a response to it. I describe this as a temporary resolution because epistemic rupture in my family is not a singular event tied to one death or one event. Epistemic rupture is an ongoing and structural condition that interrupts the transfer of intergenerational knowledge.

In this way, epistemic rupture is like structural damage to a house. Repairing one damage, or epistemic gap, does not prevent others from appearing. Nor does it guarantee that all damages can be repaired in the same way. You could fix a sagging roof and then find cracks in the support beams. One elder can pass away today, and tomorrow a new diagnosis could threaten the memory of another. Rupture is constant and structural. And yet, because epistemic gaps are

not necessarily foundational, damage is not permanent and epistemic loss is not inevitable. In my family, what prevents epistemic rupture from becoming epistemic loss is the repair work of surviving and emerging elders. In Cece's case, Mart's proximity to Aunt Sheila and her shared experience cooking alongside her positioned Mart as an eminent secondary source of knowledge. Through Mart, Cece gained access to knowledge that she had not learned directly from her mother. This knowledge transfer demonstrates that intergenerational knowledge does not move in a simple linear flow from mother to daughter, but rather, it circulates through extended kin networks, church kitchens, and shared culinary spaces.

Cece's narrative ultimately demonstrates that despite epistemic rupture, intergenerational knowledge is enduring. Even when the flow of knowledge is disrupted at one site of contact, knowledge can still be transferred through other existing conduits. Memory and the senses function as an instructor and guide. Surviving elders supplement what has been perceived as lost so emerging generations can be found. These adaptations safeguard our family's food-making practices, allowing traditional dishes and recipes to be recreated from one generation to another. As knowledge is reworked and reaffirmed through these survival mechanisms, the women ensure epistemic rupture does not compound into the complete eradication of the foods and traditions that have been a source of care and nourishment for our family. Understanding this process allows me to conceptualize what I call epistemic patchwork.

My conceptualization of epistemic patchwork does not engage the work of Wilson (2006), who theorizes patchwork as a conceptual structure to describe how scientific concepts and terms are embedded within everyday contexts and meanings. Alternatively, I refer to epistemic patchwork as the collaborative and adaptive practices the women in my family employ to mend breaks in intergenerational knowledge transfer caused by epistemic rupture. It involves

the restructuring of tacit and embodied knowledges shared from woman to woman and validated by the collective. Epistemic patchwork is strengthened by variation, substitution, memory, and the senses as the women reconstruct knowledge intergenerationally to recreate food dishes once prepared by elders who have passed on. Through epistemic patchwork, the women in my family collectively preserve and protect food and food-making traditions that have sustained kinship bonds and cultural continuity from generation to generation.

Tina

The reflections of Tina reveal that epistemic patchwork can also result in the creation of new foods and food-making practices as the women in our family adapt and respond to interruptions to traditional learning pathways. To expand upon the versatility of epistemic patchwork, I trace the genealogy of a lemon poundcake recipe that has combined the culinary knowledge, skill, and expertise of three families threaded together by Tina. As the lemon poundcake recipe changes and adapts from woman to woman, I find that epistemic patchwork in my family also engages the knowledge and food-making practices of women who extend beyond our biological kinship structure. This is an important finding because it shows that when traditional learning pathways are not accessible, the women create adaptive multigenerational knowledge networks where learning can continue through affinal and fictive kin.

To understand the journey of the lemon poundcake recipe, we must first understand Tina's journey as a foodmaker. Tina did not grow up on Josephine Street spending extensive time with earlier generations of women in our family as they cooked in the kitchen. Nor did she grow up in a multigenerational home where food-making and caretaking responsibilities were shared. Tina's reflections of her childhood reveal that she did not have the same formative experiences as other emerging elders who recalled observing and participating in the food-

making process with their elders and earlier generations of women in our family. As a result, Tina's knowledge pathway to the learning methods of the earlier generations of women in our family was largely obstructed. This represents an important shift in the flow of intergenerational knowledge because I find that Tina's early relationship with food and cooking is characterized by epistemic rupture and necessity.

This epistemic rupture is not caused by the passing of an elder, as we saw in the narrative of Cece. Rather, this epistemic rupture is a result of Tina's mother, Queenie, expanding beyond Josephine's knowledge network. This context is especially important for understanding Tina's narrative because she was born one year after Queenie left her home on Josephine to move to Winchester. In Winchester, Queenie formed new kinship structures that extended beyond her biological family still located on Josephine Street. These extended family structures allowed her to support her family in her new home (Bryant et al., 2024; Mahaffey, 2025). As Queenie shared, "When I moved to Winchester... [I lived] with your grandfather's mother." Coincidentally, Queenie's mother-in-law, Grandma Hallie, lived catty corner to her mother's sister-in-law, Aunt Hattie. Due to her close proximity, Queenie would often visit Aunt Hattie who would often care for Lulu and Tina while Queenie was at work. Queenie's early reliance on Grandma Hallie and Aunt Hattie confirm that multigenerational kinship structures "provide economic stability, emotional support, and cultural continuity" (Mahaffey, 2025, p. 24). It also emphasizes that the social support networks of women in my family are not limited to biological kin (Bryant et al., 2024). Most significant to Tina's narrative however is what happens next.

After being approved for a GI loan, Queenie's husband was able to purchase a home for their family. As fate would have it, this house would be located right next to Aunt Hattie, Queenie recalled:

“Your grandfather, he got a GI loan to get a home. So that’s when we moved up on [Chester] Avenue. So, my aunt lived on [Clark] Street, and she said, ‘I think we’re going to be neighbors because we got the same house, but it’s on [Chester] avenue.’ I said, ‘that’s where I’m going too.’ So, when we got up there, she was right beside me...it just happened that way”

Queenie’s close proximity to Aunt Hattie allowed her to maintain her support network as her family continued to grow. It is through this support network that Aunt Hattie would become a primary source of knowledge and support for Tina. As Queenie described, “When we up on [Chester] your mother was crazy about Aunt Hattie. That’s how it all began.” Although Tina did not have close proximity to her elders that lived on Josephine Street, she was able to develop a close relationship with Aunt Hattie that was foundational to her upbringing.

As a result of Tina’s physical and relational distance from Josephine, the center of our family’s knowledge network, and at times from her mother, she relied on extended kin, like Aunt Hattie, to develop her knowledge of food-making. Through Tina’s close relationship with Aunt Hattie, whom she affectionately referred to as Nanny, the knowledge of earlier generations of women in our family was supplemented by the knowledge of Aunt Hattie. Tina recalls this process beginning as early as the age of ten, when she learned how to prepare food in Aunt Hattie’s kitchen. In reflecting on the origins of her food-making practices, Tina shared, “I learned how to cook by hanging out at Nanny’s house and watching her...By mom working all the time, I started cooking for the four of us.” Tina’s reflection reveals that by spending time with and observing Nanny, she was able to develop the foundational skills that allowed her to cook and prepare food for her and her sisters while her mom was working.

This was an especially important for Tina who shared, “If I didn’t cook, we didn’t eat,” illuminating the urgency that situated her knowledge of food-making. Unlike the emerging elders who spent extensive time on Josephine Street, Tina carried the primary responsibility of food-making for her and her sisters. Compared to Lulu who shared, “I didn’t learn how to cook...I was spoiled. I never had to be in the kitchen. I just had to be there to eat,” the stakes for Tina were very different. This distinction is important because it shows Tina’s food-making journey, was ultimately motivated by physiological needs. Based on this understanding, I view Aunt Hattie’s role in Tina’s life as essential not only to the development of her cooking practices but also her livelihood. This is especially important as I consider the impact of epistemic rupture.

In Tina’s case, epistemic rupture did not stem from death but from spatial displacement and structural reorganization of kinship. In the absence of Tina’s biological elders, the multigenerational support of the extended kin network created by her mother was their next line of defense. As Mahaffey (2025) affirms, Black families who shifted away from multigenerational kinship structures and towards the nuclear family model during this time, did so at the cost of the support systems that sustained and nourished their being. The consequences of this loss of support, disproportionately impacted Black mothers who Mahaffey (2025) asserts, “found themselves shouldering the caregiving and financial burdens of their families without the support of extended kin” (p. 24). This shapes and contextualizes my understanding of the significance of Queenie forming an extended family network when she moved to Winchester with her husband. This response to epistemic rupture stabilized the family’s caregiving and knowledge structures during a period of transition.

It is important to note that, these adaptive kinship structures formed through extended networks of affinal, and fictive kin do not replace the role or importance of biological kinship in my family. Tina recalled spending summers on Josephine Street and never missing a holiday. And although she did not learn any of the family's food or food-making practices on Josephine as a child, she would make it her mission to learn them as an adult. As Tina shared, "before Grandma got sick, she told me how she did her sauerkraut and my sauerkraut tastes just like her sauerkraut when I make it." In this way, I find that extended networks that include affinal and fictive kin are meant to supplement the knowledge and support of biological kin and not replace it completely. This is an important distinction because it affirms that even when a family member is out of network, they are not completely disconnected from the family.

This claim is supported by the extended kinship networks that she creates when she moves to Maryland after Nanny's passing. In Maryland, Tina again finds herself outside the range of her biological elders. And yet, Tina's response to this epistemic rupture reveals that in the absence of the women in her biological family, she forms extended kinship structures with chosen elders who are close to her in proximity and relationality. Although these women are not related to Tina biologically, their closeness provides Tina with alternative access to knowledge and support that facilitates the transfer of intergenerational knowledge through food. Affirming that chosen elders do not replace biological elders, Tina's reflection that the knowledge she receives from her extended kin is then blended with the knowledge of her biological family members. This is demonstrated through Tina's reflection of how she learned how to make lemon poundcake through her relationships with chosen elders in her extended kinship network.

We begin with Tina's relationship with Aunt Marie Lou, my paternal great-aunt and the originator of this recipe. Their relationship is interesting to me because Tina recalled being afraid

of Aunt Marie Lou when she first met her, and I have never known Tina to be afraid of anyone. In the beginning of their relationship, for example, Tina would ask Aunt Marie Lou's sister, Emma Jean, to ask Aunt Marie Lou to make a lemon poundcake because she was too afraid. But eventually, Tina to work up the courage to ask herself. "With time," as Tina described, they grew close, connecting over Aunt Marie Lou's lemon poundcake recipe. In fact, Aunt Marie Lou would make lemon poundcake every time Tina came to Danville. Until one day, Tina asked for the recipe. Tina shared:

"Well, the lemon poundcake recipe got passed down because I kept asking Aunt Marie Lou to make it for me. I asked her to send me the recipe. The next time I went to Danville, she handed me the recipe card."

Once Tina received the recipe on a handwritten index card, she practiced the recipe repeatedly until she mastered the recipe, evidenced by "the cake coming out the pan smooth." As her confidence increased, she began experimenting with the recipe. With Aunt Marie Lou in Virginia and Tina in Maryland, her observational exposure to Aunt Marie Lou's baking knowledge was limited to her visits in the summer. And so, she turned to the assistance of another elder closer in proximity, Mrs. Mouzon.

Through geographic proximity and church affiliation, Mrs. Mouzon became a chosen elder whose baking expertise supplemented Tina's limited access to Aunt Marie Lou's embodied instruction. As Mrs. Mouzon was someone who had developed significant baking expertise, Tina turned to her knowledge as she began experimenting with Aunt Marie Lou's poundcake recipe. As she spent more time across the street with Mrs. Mouzon, Tina began learning new techniques and methods she observed from watching

Mrs. Mouzon bake. The new techniques and methods learned from Mrs. Mouzon, most notably her lemon glaze, were then incorporated into Aunt Marie Lou's original recipe.

As Tina combined the knowledge of Aunt Marie Lou and Mrs. Mouzon, she continued experimenting until she felt she had perfected her version of the lemon poundcake recipe. As Tina began sharing the cake widely with her loved ones her mastery was validated by her elders who began asking her for her recipe. As Tina explained, "the poundcake is the recipe everyone always asked for...Mom...Mrs. Mouzon...Mama Marsh." Here, validation moves upward, deconstructing my assumption that authority flows only from elder to novice. The process of Tina sharing her poundcake recipe is interesting because this is the first example of intergenerational knowledge not just being passed, down but also up. To me, this is the strongest indicator of Tina's mastery and expertise because the women who are regarded as the most knowledgeable are now learning from Tina's experimentation. This matters because it evidences Tina's growth and development as a foodmaker. No longer is she the novice that learned from watching Nanny in the kitchen, she is not an equally contributing member of the intergenerational knowledge network.

As specially requested, Tina would bring Queenie a lemon poundcake whenever she visited. This is significant because Tina described this moment to be the first time that she and her mother connected over a recipe. After the loss of her sister, Queenie began her own baking journey to "keep herself busy." In addition to her aunt's pocket roll recipe, she would also request Tina's lemon poundcake recipe from Aunt Marie Lou. Tina shared, "I think after Sheila passed is when she started baking...so I gave it to her. Matter of fact, she has the original recipe card." As baking allowed Queenie to "take her mind off things," as she described, she fully

immersed herself into her baking. This is confirmed by Lulu, who shared, “when she bakes her cakes it’s like she’s in her own world...” Although this suggests to me that baking was healing for Queenie, it is what she did with her cakes that was most impactful for her. She would make three or four poundcakes at a time and drop them off to her church or those who were sick or in bereavement. This was most rewarding for Queenie who shared, “it makes you feel good when you do for others...it’s my calling... it comes from the heart.” In this way, baking functioned first as grief management and later as relational ministry, transforming private healing into communal care.

As Queenie continued baking and experimenting with Aunt Marie Lou’s poundcake recipe, she began deviating from the original recipe and creating new variations that became popular in the family. As Tina described, “I think from making the lemon poundcake, she decided to try banana. And when banana became a hit, and everybody liked it, she tried the lemon poundcake.” As Queenie’s poundcake variations became popular in the family, the became known as her specialty. As Lainey affirmed, “I didn’t try to compete. Why? If someone has a specialty and they do their best with the specialty...why should you do it?”

What is particularly important is that although Queenie’s rendition of the lemon poundcake became known as her specialty, Tina consistently ensures Aunt Marie Lou receives credit. As Tina shared, “it started from Aunt Marie Lou and it was her recipe...her family recipe, and she passed it down to me,” she evidences that intergenerational knowledge extends beyond biological lineage. As Tina suggests, this transfer of knowledge requires close relationality that is developed over time:

“It took me a minute to get that recipe...she didn’t give it to me right away. We had

to develop a close bond...and then one day she just gave it to me...it was hand-written on an index card.”

I view this transfer of knowledge as one rooted in deep intentionality. This epistemic gift was earned through the trust and close proximity that Tina developed with Aunt Marie Lou. This is evidenced by Aunt Marie Lou personally handwriting the recipe and sharing a physical copy with Tina. As recipes in my family are typically learned through repeated watching and practicing, it was interesting that Aunt Marie Lou formalized Tina’s access to her recipe. By inscribing the recipe on an index card, Aunt Marie Lou converted embodied knowledge into a durable form of transmission and affirmed the bond they had developed. This is evidenced by Tina, who shared, “none of her kids made her poundcakes, she just gave it to me” further confirming how close they grew to one another.

What Tina does with this gift is equally significant. She becomes the connection between three families whose knowledge converges through a single recipe. As Tina receives the recipes from Aunt Marie Lou, perfects the recipe with Mrs. Mouzon, and then shares it with her Queenie, Tina’s lemon poundcake illustrates that epistemic patchwork extends beyond biological lineage. The recipe originated with Aunt Marie Lou, was refined through Tina’s proximity to Mrs. Mouzon, and ultimately circulated upward to Queenie, destabilizing a strictly downward model of intergenerational transfer. Extended kinship networks functioned here as adaptive supplements, expanding Tina’s access to knowledge without displacing the symbolic centrality of biological elders. Through experimentation, variation, and collective validation, the recipe became a shared family staple. In this way, epistemic rupture did not result in epistemic loss; rather, it generated a reconfigured knowledge network whose seams remain visible in the layered composition of the cake itself.

What emerges, then, is not merely continuity but expansion. Tina's access to knowledge is not restored to its prior form; it is reconfigured across biological, affinal, and fictive lines, producing a denser and more resilient knowledge network. The recipe thus becomes both epistemic infrastructure and relational bridge, binding mother and daughter through shared authorship of variation. Not only did it strengthen the support that Tina had in her new home in Maryland, but it also strengthened her connection to her mother as they bonded over the recipe and all of its variations.

Although Tina's journey expands our understanding of how knowledge travels across chosen kinship networks, the final narrative returns us to Josephine, though it is not the same Josephine of earlier generations. Grandma Thelma is no longer there, and the apple orchard that once supplied her kitchen has been transformed. I find that epistemic rupture can also be shaped by material conditions and changes to the environment. Yet through Josefina Iris' recreation of Grandma Thelma's applesauce in Maryland, we see that even when elders pass, and landscapes shift, the women continue to respond through epistemic patchwork to maintain access to their connection to family and food. While Tina's narrative demonstrates how rupture is navigated through kinship reconfiguration, the final narrative reveals that rupture can also emerge from material and environmental transformation.

Josefina Iris

The food and food-making practices of the women in my family demonstrate how the production and reproduction of knowledge is deeply sensitive to structural changes that impact the environment. Through reflections on how to make her mother, Thelma's applesauce, Josefina Iris, illustrates how the women in my family have adapted and produced new knowledge in response to Josephine's changing landscape. I begin with Queenie, Lainey, and Lulu whose

reflections provide context for the local apple orchard, where earlier generations of women in our family once labored. This context is important because in laboring in the apple orchard and tending to the land, my Grandma Thelma established an important relationship between my family and the fruit she once helped to cultivate. This relationship resulted in her most coveted recipe to this day, applesauce.

The apple orchard serves as a foundational site for the livelihoods of the emerging and existing elders in my family. For existing elders, like Queenie and Lainey, the apple orchard represents an additional source of income for the earlier generations of women in my family, many of whom also held jobs doing domestic work. As Lainey shared:

“They would poison the mice...Mama and Geneva, Francis, all of them...they’d be out in the apple orchard poisoning mice around the trees and everything...to keep the mice away from the apple trees...And Mama said that she worked like that because in December they would receive a bonus...they worked hard...Mama also had a Saturday job that I later took on cleaning the house of Mrs. Sykes...she also cooked for James Willis next door, and that was extra income.”

Beyond providing an additional source of income, the apple orchard also provided an additional source of food for this generation of women. While working at the apple orchard, Grandma Thelma would gather fallen and overripe apples that could not be sold and take them home to her family, where she would make applesauce and apple butter. As time went on, Grandma Thelma would also teach her children how to gather apples, demonstrating her knowledge of food circularity as well as a collective responsibility for food procurement. Queenie shared:

“...we used to go out in the orchard with her picking apples...As we got

older...And we would go pick the apples off the ground. We couldn't get up in the trees, but we would go pick the apples off the ground for her."

Through this reflection, Queenie shows that the knowledge that Grandma Thelma used to gather apples for her family has now been passed down to her children, who are now participating and sharing responsibility in the procurement of food.

What is also interesting to me here is that Queenie reveals that they "couldn't get up in the trees" but they could pick the apples off the ground for Grandma Thelma. This emphasis suggests to me that her mother's knowledge of food circularity exists within yet extends beyond capitalist logics as well as ethical and moral limitations. In this way, I use Queenie's reflection to interpret fruit still attached to the tree as fruit that is still economically valuable to the apple orchard (Arseneault & Cline, 2016; Schmitz et al., 2025). Yet, fruit that had fallen to the ground would generally be seen as less valuable, and thus okay for the women to gather (Arseneault & Cline, 2016; Schmitz et al., 2025). At the same time, given how long the women worked at the apple orchard, I also wonder if they were given permission to collect the apples that had fallen, as they are less valuable economically. Because Grandma Thelma is not here to ask directly, these are largely interpretations, but still in her teaching her children to only gather fruit that had fallen, she offers insight into the moral and ethical limitations of food procurement during this time. Using historical analysis, I suggest that the moral and ethical limitations of what apples could be gathered and which apples could not offer deeper insights into how the women navigated and to a degree, understood, capitalist logics rooted in anti-blackness.

By teaching her children to only gather fruit from the ground, I view this as Grandma Thelma understanding how to navigate anti-black and capitalist logics, based on a larger sociocultural understanding that there are consequences for not behaving within these logics as a

Black person during this time (Curtin, 2000). For example, Black people caught “stealing” crops and produce, even if they were the ones who produced it, were often subjected to legal and state-sanctioned, violence and retaliation that often resulted in jail or death (Black, 2018; Curtin, 2000; Meyn, 2024). Given that Grandma Thelma worked at the apple orchard and taught her children how to gather apples in this orchard during the Jim Crow Era, this context allows me to situate this food labor as one that required not only knowledge of food, but knowledge of how to navigate the environment and sociocultural landscape in which this food was procured. And yet within these logics, Grandma Thelma demonstrates that her relationship to food exists outside of the confines of capitalism and anti-blackness. The process of gathering fallen apples and teaching her children how to participate in this process, shows that Grandma Thelma found value in fruit that was deemed less valuable, and used these resources to provide for her family. This further suggests to me that Grandma Thelma’s knowledge of food circularity was rooted not only in the commitment to provide for her family economically, but also in a commitment to eliminate waste and maximize resources that could be used to nourish her family physiologically.

Taken together, the reflections of Lainey and Queenie are important because the context both women provide demonstrates that Grandma Thelma’s apple recipe was not just born out of creativity and innovation, but also a great sense of urgency to support and sustain her family’s well-being. As a result of this urgency, Grandma Thelma was able to leverage her knowledge of food circularity and the food landscape of her time to use the apples that were not as valuable to the apple orchard to provide an additional source of nourishment for her family. Importantly, she would continue to share this knowledge with her grandchildren who would continue the tradition of gathering apples for Grandma Thelma’s apple sauce. This was especially important when

Grandma Thelma left the apple orchard to begin working at a sewing factory in Winchester, at the start of integration. Lainey affirmed:

“But Mama did that...she had to continue on doing her days work and everything, until the sewing factory in Winchester opened up. I think that happened when I was like a senior...or after I graduated...the sewing factory opened up, and they were all hired in the sewing factory.”

Lainey’s reflection is important because it contextualizes a major shift that impacted Grandma Thelma’s process of making her applesauce. As Lainey recalled later in our conversation together, “they integrated high schools my senior year.” This was an important revelation because it revealed the context behind Grandma Thelma’s shift away from agricultural labor in the apple orchard, to her new position as an industrial worker in a textile factory. Grandma Thelma leaving the apple orchard to begin working at a textile factory, shows that not all epistemic ruptures are negative. In this case, she was able to take advantage of newly gained access to higher wages that industrialized labor afforded, she and other Black women during this (Frederickson, 1982; Minchin, 2000). This access is largely attributed to changes in the workforce after labor shortages during World War II (Frederickson, 1982), as well as federal civil rights legislation (Minchin, 2000). And although the exclusion of Black women and men from the job force continued, the mid-1960s would become known for the major shift that resulted in an increase in Black workers at southern textile factories (Frederickson, 1982).

As a result of this shift, Grandma Thelma no longer had direct access to the apples she once helped to cultivate and harvest at the apple orchard. In response to this loss of access, she began sending her grandchildren to the apple orchards at night, to collect apples so that she could continue making her applesauce. This would become a new food-making practice that became

the sole responsibility for today's emerging elders who grew up and spent extensive time on Josephine Street. Lulu shared:

“People used to bring her apples from the orchard. Or we would go help her pick apples from the orchard...we would go there at night, it wasn't stealing...just taking apples. And we would pick the apples for her and bring them back up to the house.”

Once the apples were collected, emerging elders like Cece, Lulu, and Josefina Iris, would often help Grandma Thelma peel and stir the apples, as she prepared her applesauce. This is a practice that would continue into their adulthood, until Grandma Thelma's passing. Lulu shared:

“I remember her just sitting there...just peeling them...one day we were helping her, my hands would cramp up, and I'm like how does she sit here and do it by hand?”

As time continued, and emerging elders became adults, they would introduce Grandma Thelma to new gadgets that they used to help her make her applesauce. As Lulu also recalled:

“One time me and [Tess] went home with her...[Tess], my younger sister, and [Cece], her other granddaughter was there...we helped her peel the apples. I got tired. My hands was like this [cramping]. So, I remember her son, brought her this apple peeler. I said, ‘Mom, where's the apple peeler?’ We dug it out the closet and put the apples on there like this with the machine. So, we did like two bushels for her, and then she ended up saying, ‘Go on out there, get the rest of them apples so we can go ahead and peel them.’ So, we ended up going that for her.”

Lulu's reflection confirms that as younger generations age and learn from their elders, they also begin introducing new knowledge to their elders that support food and food-making. This is evidenced by Lulu's uncle, purchasing an apple peeler for his mother to use when she makes her apple sauce. It is important to note that although Lulu's uncle purchased this gadget, Grandma

Thelma continued to peel apples her way, by hand. In digging this gadget out of the closet, and showing Grandma Thelma how to use it, emerging elders like Lulu and Cece, teach Grandma Thelma how to peel apples in a different way that Lulu finds more efficient. As Grandma Thelma does not stop her grandchildren but instead tells them to go the other bushels of apples to be peeled, she suggests that although she does not use the apple peeler herself, she accepts this new way to peel apples that she learned from her grandchildren.

Lulu's reflection is important because it shows that in spending time with Grandma Thelma and helping her procure and peel apples for her applesauce, they gain opportunities to participate in the food-making process. This allowed emerging elders to watch and observe how Grandma Thelma makes her applesauce recipe. As Cece confirmed:

“She would peel the apples, and then she would have us over at the stove stirring the apples up, making sure they wasn't going to burn, and they had to be just right. And if you wasn't doing it right, you better believe she gon' tell ya.”

This is important to note because there is no written or recorded recipe for Grandma Thelma's applesauce. And so it is only through this observational process that relied heavily on embodied knowledge and memory that emerging elders would be able to learn Grandma Thelma's applesauce recipe. This is evidenced by Josefina Iris, who is the only emerging elder that recreate Grandma Thelma's applesauce recipe.

As previously stated, Josefina Iris is the youngest daughter of Grandma Thelma. This is important to note because it is her position between the generations of her older sisters, and that of her nieces, that allows her to recreate her mother's applesauce recipe relying on her memory and embodied knowledge of cooking with her mother. By the time Josefina Iris began cooking with her mother, it was only she and her older sister, Sheila, in the house that they shared with

their grandmother, Marie, and Aunt Alice. This closeness however, taught her to attend to subtle sensory cues rather than explicit direction and instruction from her mother as they prepared applesauce together. As Josefina Iris recalled this process, she explained:

“Yeah, so it’s just her, well, peeling the apples. First of all...that takes the longest time. But just her saying, how much water to take and put in the pot, ‘don’t put too much, because the apples make their own water’. And then just asking her, ‘Okay, how much cinnamon do you put in? How much nutmeg do you put in?’ And she was like, ‘just a dash, or just a pinch, or just until the taste’. So, there was no measuring to anything, and all of their cooking was all by sight or taste.”

Although Josefina Iris vividly remembers the process of making applesauce side by side with her mother, this embodied knowledge is still made vulnerable by epistemic rupture. At a glance, this epistemic rupture was caused by the passing of Grandma Thelma in 2017. But a closer look reveals that this rupture is also caused by the decline, and eventual closure of the apple orchard after a failed harvest in 2018 (Burton, 2019). As a result, the reflections of Josefina Iris evidence that Grandma Thelma’s “recipe” for applesauce has changed, not because of her passing, but because we no longer have access to the same source of apples she once used to make her applesauce.

Josefina Iris describes how this epistemic rupture has changed how she recreates her mother’s applesauce, today, as we no longer have access to the apple orchard. She shared:

“Well, you have to go to a place that sells bushels of apples, because you can go get a half bushel or full bushel. So, there’s Miller’s farm here in Clinton, Maryland, which is where [Lainey] and I go to get apples. The process is the same as a matter of getting the apples and taking the time to peel them...”

Importantly, Josefina Iris emphasizes that the process of making the applesauce has remained the same, although the main ingredient used has changed. This is important because it shows that the knowledge Josefina Iris received from Grandma Thelma has remained intact despite epistemic rupture, confirming that rupture does not result in a total loss of knowledge. In fact, as Josefina Iris recreates her mother's recipe, she relies on her memories and embodied knowledge gained from time spent making apple sauce with her mother, to match the taste of her applesauce to that of her mother's. She described:

“Golden Delicious apples make the best applesauce. So, peeling them, and then having that big kettle enough to hold it, putting the right amount of water and getting the boil going, putting the apples in, and stirring them and making sure that tenderness is there that needs to be there. And then we all have the old fashioned cranker to do the applesauce. And then again, I just season my applesauce based on mom's, with cinnamon and nutmeg and sugar, until I just get that right taste.”

Josefina Iris' success in recreating her mother's applesauce recipe, despite epistemic rupture, is affirmed and validated by her older sister, Lainey:

“Lynette and I learned her [Mama's] masterpiece, her homemade applesauce. The only difference in the taste and the picture of Mama's homemade applesauce and Lynette's, is that Lynette's applesauce is darker than Mama's.”

Through Lainey's reflection, not only do we see that slight deviation from the original recipe is accepted as long as the taste is similar, but we also see once again that the validation of knowledge happens through the collective, and not just by the authority of the individual. Given that Lainey is a prominent elder, this approval also further legitimizes Josefina Iris' specialized

knowledge as one of the only members in the family who can closely recreate Grandma Thelma's applesauce.

In demonstrating that epistemic rupture does not equate to complete epistemic loss, Josefina Iris' narrative offers an important lesson on how the women in my family adapt to their environments to maintain tradition. This is especially important today, as the Josephine of today, is not the same Josephine that was known intimately by earlier generations of women in my family. As elders pass on and landscapes change, Josefina Iris reminds us that this time spent with family is precious, even when we do not realize it. As Josefina Iris shared:

“when you have that many aunties and uncles and then all 14 of them are gone, it's like...you really miss them...I just enjoy the time. And now that I don't have it, I really miss it. I really miss it...I didn't think I would get emotional behind it...I don't think you value or appreciate it when you're younger.”

This reflection by Josefina Iris is poignant because it in this moment of vulnerability, I am reminded that food, family, and tradition, are at the mercy of time that we are not promised as Black women (Ladner, 1971; Ryan, 1992). This is an urgency that the emerging elders in my family know all too well. For this reason, I view the adaptations and modifications to food-making practices and recipes employed by the women in my family as necessary to maintaining the food traditions and recipes endangered and compromised by epistemic rupture.

As the emerging elders in my family, who will one day soon become the next generation of elders, continue to respond to epistemic rupture, I find that the knowledge they create and share supports the preservation of intergenerational knowledge for future generations. In this way, I view the knowledge preservation practices of emerging elders as important epistemic work that must be learned and continued by younger generations to sustain and preserve

intergenerational knowledge for the future. In the next section, I reflect on how younger generations in my family answer this call, so that the knowledge of our elders lives on.

Tertiary

The final and tertiary level in the flow of knowledge diagram consists of the youngest generation of women in my family. These women are the daughters, nieces, and younger cousins of emerging elders, and the granddaughters and great-nieces of existing elders. While they were often too young to cook and prepare food alongside earlier generations, they remember what traditional foods tasted like, as we frequently gathered around food on Josephine Street. Many were also fortunate to know some of the earlier generations while they were still living. As a result of these experiences, the women in this generation hold a developing, novice-level understanding of family foods and traditions. While this understanding is shaped more by memory, shared, presence, and observation, the women in this generation also mark a shift towards more direct instruction as they seek the recipes of emerging and existing elders.

The placement of the younger generation at the base of the diagram reflects the emergence of knowledge, rather than deficiency, indicating that knowledge is still actively being transferred and formed. The data suggests that shared intergenerational moments were formative for these younger women, who now confront the reality that the women who carried this knowledge will not always be here. This motivation reveals a shift in tempo as younger generations' methods of preservation are intentional and proactive, as they work with a heightened sense of awareness of time and temporality. Intergenerational knowledge transfer cannot be assumed; it must be actively pursued. For this generation, the preservation of knowledge is deliberately retrieved and protected while elders are still here to share it.

Importantly, the tertiary level is also where I position myself within my family. This positioning allows me to examine the transfer of intergenerational knowledge not only as a research, but also as a member of this extended kinship network. My vantage point within this level deepens my analysis, as I draw upon insider knowledge of our food and food-making traditions to make sense of the urgency surrounding preservation. The insights offered in this section are further supported by another member of the younger generation, my older sister, Sarai, who emphasizes the importance of protecting the knowledge and recipes of our elders. Her reflections on her upbringing, along with her experiences as a new mother, illuminate what is at stake for our family as we consider the intersections of food, family, and perpetuation across past, present, and future generations.

Together, our reflections illuminate the intergenerational knowledge transmission practices that continue within our family today. In considering both the methods we learned from our elders, and the strategies we have begun creating to preserve this knowledge for ourselves and future generations, we confirm that the transfer of knowledge is not inherited or innate, but rather a process that requires active participation. That participation often looks different for us than it did for earlier generations. And yet, our reflections reveal that the priority to remain connected to family and to remember the knowledge of our elders remains consistent, even as our methods evolve. I find that the efforts of younger generations, are strengthened by the cooperation, compliance and support of older generations, many of whom also have a desire to pass knowledge and food traditions on so that it may be preserved for future generations.

The data also supports that as younger generations receive knowledge of food and food-making traditions from elders, they also receive guidance and wisdom on the importance of continuity. In this way, elders often gift younger generations the responsibility to maintain this

knowledge for future generations, so that it can continued to be shared. As younger generations intentionally create time to cook and learn from their elders, the knowledge-making and knowledge preservation methods of our family not only illuminate intergenerational knowledge, but also what is at stake and why this knowledge must be protected across generations.

I begin with a brief reflection from Lulu who describes the current state of our family's extended knowledge network as the earlier generations of women in our family have completely passed on. She shared:

“It’s just nowadays that if you want to learn the old recipes...all of them are gone, like my grandma and them and her sisters, they’re all gone...Rosie was the last one. So, you have to learn from mom now and her generation, if you want it. But if you do go talk to them, record it, yeah, for you’ll know.”

Lulu’s reflection is important because it highlights how key knowledge holders transition into their role as earlier generations of women pass on. It is important to note here again that this transition is not one that is inherited, but rather one that is earned by through extended learning opportunities from previous generations. This is confirmed by Lulu who reveals that in the absence of Grandma Thelma, her mother, and her sisters, Queenie’s generation now holds the position as key knowledge holders in our family. As the most knowledgeable elders still living in our family, these are the women who we must learn from. Importantly, Lulu further suggests that as the elders in our family will also one day pass on, the emerging elders will be next to hold this position. In our conversations, she shared that next up would be, emerging elders such as Tina and Cece, revealing that the roles of family members continue to shift as our lineage goes on and as elders transition on. This is important because based on this pattern, the younger generation of today, will one day emerge as the next generation of elders.

In order for women in the younger generations to assume this position, however, they must first receive the knowledge of their elders still living today. I call special attention to Lulu's phrasing, "if you want it," to again emphasize that the learning process for younger generations is not one that is inherent or innate, but rather it is something that must be actively sought after. This is confirmed by Lulu's recommendation for younger generations to seek out their elders to learn the recipes and food traditions of their ancestors. In fact, this is something that Lulu believes we "have to" do in order to learn from the existing elders in our family. This was further emphasized by Lulu when she stated, "for y'all generation, you have to spend time with your grandmother, and your great aunts, and your great cousins to learn things, you know, to practice it." Again, we see that for the women in my family, the transfer of knowledge across generations relies on close proximity to elders and repeated practice preparing traditional family recipes and foods.

Lulu's recommendations also reveal a new method for how younger generations can better preserve this knowledge by recording their time spent with elders. As she shared, "record it...for you'll know," she offers a way for younger generations to remain connected to the knowledge of their elders directly, even when they are no longer in close proximity. This is further emphasized by Lulu when she reinforces that when we are learning and cooking with our elders we should take advantage of the technology that we have at our disposal. I found this to be an especially important recommendation as it is seldom that our family's recipes are written down. Recording then, provides an opportunity to reinforce knowledge that is embodied as we continue to spend time learning from our elders. As Lulu continued she emphasized this importance stating, "video tape it, just video it, record it...everybody with their phone, with the technology today, gotta record it...because you can't write it down." I interpreted Lulu's

recommendations as rooted in the wisdom and knowledge of precarity. Her life experiences have taught her that family members can be here today and gone tomorrow. I, therefore, view Lulu's suggestions to younger generations as informed by her own experiences that have been shaped by the loss of her elders. At the same time, her recommendations also allow us to reinforce the knowledge and memories that are deeply embodied, so that we might better preserve this knowledge and make it easily transferable for future generations. This finding is supported by my time spent cooking with my mother, Tina, as I recorded her as she taught me how to prepare greens and potato salad.

From beginning to end, Tina modeled how to engage the senses as tools of knowing. She never used a gadget or kitchen timer. Instead, she relied on her eyes, ears, and mouth to listen, watch, and taste her way through each step of this process. She listened carefully as her smoked turkey and spices simmered in a large pot of water, paying attention to the sounds and movements of the liquor. When she heard and saw the mixture was bubbling rapidly, she knew it was time to add her freshly cleaned greens to the pot. Tina explained:

“See? That’s what three bundles looks like. See ‘em cooking? You can stir it, if you want...When the greens are tender, you know they’re good to go. They need to cook at least two hours, depending on how much you’re cooking.”

As her greens began to shrink in the pot, she added a little more seasoning, stirred again, then put a lid on the pot. After about two hours, when the aromatic smell of the greens filled her kitchen, she returned to the pot and reached in with a fork to check their tenderness. Taking out a healthy forkful of greens, she tasted them. “Mmm!” she exclaimed, signaling that they were done and tasted just right. In these moments, Tina’s sense of knowing was produced through embodied and sensory methods, rather than adherence to standardized measures. Throughout this process,

Tina was guided by sound, sight, smell, taste, and touch, demonstrating how she uses her body as an instrument of knowledge.

In recording Tina and I throughout this process, I was able to capture the actions, movements, and gestures she modeled as she taught me how to prepare greens. Even if I did not remember every single thing Tina did in this moment, recording her provided me with another opportunity to go back and watch this process again. Although rewatching a recording is not the same as cooking side by side with Tina in real time, it was helpful in that it documented the physical, sensory, and affective behaviors and actions required to recreate Tina's recipe that remains largely embodied. As I reflected on this process, I realized that recording Tina and I cooking together was not necessarily about "capturing" her embodied knowledge, or even about translating this knowledge into a more legible form. Instead, I realized that recording this process allowed me to reinforce the embodied understandings I learned from Tina so I would not have to rely on memorization alone.

What was most interesting to me about this process is that my approach to recording was influenced by my role as not only family member, but also a researcher. While cooking with my mother, Tina, was a bonding experience for us both, it was also a form of participant-observation (Lindeman, 1924; Malinowski, 1922). Going into my participant-observation with Tina, I knew that I would be recording our time together because I believed that is what researchers do to strengthen the accuracy, reliability, and depth of their findings (Goldman-Segall, 1995; 1998). At the same time, recording this process allowed me to engage fully in the cooking process as Tina's daughter, and not just a researcher. In reviewing the recorded sessions of Tina and I cooking together, I found that how I navigated the participant-observation, shifting between daughter and researcher, informed how Tina showed up as a mother or as a participant. And so,

while I expected to take detailed fieldnotes of Tina's embodied practices as she taught me how to prepare traditional family recipes, I found that something as ordinary as cooking with my mother, revealed something much more profound. This shift was evidenced by Tina's demonstration of how to prepare her deviled eggs and potato salad recipe.

As Tina began to prepare her deviled eggs, she had all of her ingredients neatly organized on the countertop. After her boiled eggs cooled in a cold pot of water in the sink, she began to slice her eggs in half and remove the yolks. As I recorded her from behind the camera, I asked her to explain what she is doing. As she continued, she shared, "I am slicing the eggs in half, then I'm going to take the yolk out and mix in my ingredients." Once the yolks were all removed, Tina began to mash up her egg yolks to get a smooth consistency. She then began adding in her Hellman's mayonnaise, mustard, salt, and pepper to her bowl of bright yellow egg yolks. What was interesting about this process was that as Tina continued explaining her steps, she also began to measure out her ingredients. This was interesting to me because when Tina is cooking, she normally does not measure any of her ingredients. Surprised by Tina's measuring, I asked Tina if she usually measures her ingredients when she makes deviled eggs. Tina responded by sharing that, "I'm only kind of measuring because you're recording...otherwise I would just take the scooper and just add a little, put it back, then add it again...eyeball it." As I affirmed to Tina that she can cook as she usually does although she is being recorded, Sarai, my older sister, and Tina's oldest daughter chimed in, reaffirming to Tina that she "shouldn't be measuring" if she doesn't usually measure.

In addition to her measuring her ingredients, the inflection of her voice also changed. I interpreted these changes as Tina almost performing because I was recording her. And so, in hopes of making Tina more comfortable being recorded and encouraging her to show up exactly

as she is, I reminded Tina that although I am recording, I will not share my recordings with anyone other than myself. Once Tina heard this, she responded “okay,” and begin preparing the rest of the recipe as she normally would. As Tina became more comfortable, she began speaking to Sarai and I as she normally would when we help in the kitchen. She invited us to participate in the food-making process as we were instructed to grab her *secret* ingredient, taste her deviled egg filling, and then finally help her fill the eggs one by one. As I began helping Tina, I propped the camera up and became fully emerged in the food-making process with her. In this moment, I stepped away from my role as a researcher and into my role as her daughter who always helps her in the kitchen.

Once Tina stored her deviled eggs in a storage container and placed them in the refrigerator, she began washing her dirty dishes. As she washed her dishes, she continued to rely on Sarai and I throughout the food-making process, instructing us to begin peeling her potatoes so we could begin to help her prepare potato salad. Although Tina continued to give us verbal instructions before she joined us in peeling and dicing the potatoes, her instruction this time around was vastly different than how she started preparing her deviled eggs. As we helped Tina make potato salad, she showed us by modeling what she wanted us to do. For example, as she began peeling and dicing the potatoes, she explained:

“cut them with a knife...you probably could use her peeler, but you want to make sure you get as less skin as possible...so you want to cut it in half and then go like this, and then you can do it like this..”

Compared to Tina’s instructions as she prepared deviled eggs, Sarai and I were more actively involved in the making of Tina’s potato salad. Tina also showed us what to do as we peeled and diced the potatoes, as we modeled her behaviors, rather than her solely providing verbal

instructions and measurements as we watched her. I found that the process of making potato salad with Tina was more authentic to the narratives of the women in my family who explained how they learned to cook by participating in the food-making process with their elders.

I also found that as we continued cooking with Tina, she began to share more information about her own culinary beliefs, experiences, and techniques as she began to reflect on her own memories of family and food as we prepared this dish. For example, Tina, Sarai, and I reflected on a time when my grandmother, Queenie, was making potato salad and accidentally opened the wrong side of the pepper shaker and dumped a heap of pepper in the potato salad, making it equally inedible as it was hilarious. Most meaningful for me, however, was the wisdom Tina shared with us as we continued preparing her potato salad. She shared, “If you don’t love to cook, it’s not going to be good. You have to cook with love. See how that is? I’m going to add a little more mustard for the yellow color...This should be good right here...Mmm, mmm, mmm...Voila!” Here we see that Tina’s wisdom is intertwined with her food-making knowledge as she transitions seamlessly between “you have to cook with love” to using her sensory knowledge to see what ingredients need to be adjusted and then confirming when she has added enough in one singular flow of consciousness.

Compared to the process of learning how to make deviled eggs, making potato salad felt truer to my experiences cooking with Tina in our day to day lives. This process was guided more by the wisdom and connection to family through food, rather than the process of direct instruction that I originally thought I needed to learn how to make these dishes. As I originally asked Tina to explain what she was doing, I found that my focus on being a researcher during this observation was a detriment to the flow of knowledge. Instead, I believe it was the action of putting the camera down and leaning into my closeness with Tina and my position as an insider

within this family that allowed me to participate more meaningfully in this transfer of knowledge. It was also this position that provided me the awareness to notice that Tina was not being true to herself due to my emphasis on recording the steps and ingredients necessary to recreate these family recipes. In leaning into my closeness with Tina, and the knowledge practices that are true for our family, I found that the time shared between Tina, Sarai, and I was more meaningful to understanding how food, family, and knowledge intertwine.

This was further emphasized by Tina's reflection on why sharing her recipes with her children is important as we finished preparing her potato salad recipe:

"I try to share them (recipes) with my children so they will be able to carry on and make these recipes for their children and families. It's very important because I want the tradition to carry on. I want it to be passed on from generation to generation. Because family means the world to me. Spending time and doing things together, talking and cooking, and eating. This is how you heal for sure and maintain the bond with family."

This moment marks an important ontological shift in the knowledge transmission process between Tina and me. Here we see that the goal is not just to teach, but to teach in a way that can be preserved for future generations. This is important because Tina explicitly shares that the continuation of not just tradition, but also family, is something that guides the methods she used to transfer this knowledge to her daughters. Again, we see that for Tina, her cooking and knowledge-making practices are not just about physiological survival, but about maintaining the connectedness of family through the foods and traditions that have sustained us and kept us together. If had continued to engage Tina as a researcher, and not a daughter throughout our time spent cooking together, I do not believe that a reflection this deep and intimate would have happened.

While technology itself, did not directly cause this shift per say, I believe my commitment to engage technology, and my family members ethically and responsibly did. Recording Tina demonstrate how to prepare our family's traditional recipes could have very well strengthened the preservation of intergenerational knowledge by making her recipes more legible and thus more transferable. However, this approach would not have effectively honored the women behind these recipes and the knowledge, wisdom, and memories they pass on as they share their cherished recipes. In sharing her recipes, Tina is not simply sharing food, she is also sharing her love for her family, and her hopes for the future rooted in her commitment to continuity, and as her daughter, and a Black woman who believes research should be ethical and reduce harm as much as possible, especially as it concerns Black women, this was an important tension that I learned to navigate as a family member and researcher in this study.

This was further evidenced when my grandmother, Queenie, opted out of audio and video recording as she felt she "wasn't done up" to be on camera after traveling from Virginia to Maryland. So, what was originally supposed to be a recorded observation, became a session where Queenie and I co-constructed the narratives behind her recipes. As my grandmother and I went over her recipes, and the stories behind them, my mother, Tina, joined the conversation and pulled out written copies of her recipes that had been transcribed on paper. What was interesting about the written copies of my grandmother's recipes is that even though she holds the necessary and key knowledge to recreate my Aunt Pete's pocket rolls or variations of my Aunt Marie Lou's poundcake recipe, she still relies on her memory rather than the written version of recipes.

As my grandmother, Queenie, explained her recipes, her orations of her instructions or ingredients used were sometimes different than what was written down. My mother, Tina, would correct Queenie, or remind her of an important step or ingredient to help keep her on track. To

ensure accuracy, my grandmother would have me repeat back everything I typed back which allowed her to correct any details or phrases that were misspoken or could be further clarified. This process of constantly revising and checking for accuracy would not have been as easy if I relied on recording alone. As my grandmother lives in Virginia, the process of having her review a recording is one that would be extremely difficult and time consuming. And so, although the format for data collection changed, it still resulted in a meaningful transfer of knowledge as my grandmother and mother, used each other to provide as much information as they could on my grandmother's recipes and food-making practices. I was able to use this information with recordings of Sarai and my mother, Tina, preparing dishes like pocket rolls with my grandmother, to not only paint a portrait of my grandmother, but also to trace how knowledge of can be transferred in different ways and different forms so that recipes can be shared with younger generations.

Through both of these experiences, I learned that as Tina and Queenie shared their recipes, they also shared their hopes for the future as younger generations continue learning how to prepare the recipes of their elders. Tina shared, "one hope for the future is that we all get along and love one another and food is an important part of that." Similarly, Queenie also hopes that learning how to prepare these foods will bring our family back together. In her reflections of how we all used to gather on Josephine during holidays, Queenie emphasizes the importance of our family getting back to the traditions that once held us together. She shared:

"See all that then changed...you know how we used to go down to Mama's on Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas, everything...our generation is close, y'all generations is so far apart...so, so, far apart...and I don't know why it's like that, I really don't...but it's very important, very, very, important."

The reflections of Tina and Queenie are important because they situate the urgency in preserving our family's recipes and food traditions. These food-making practices and gatherings are more than cultural or domestic practices; they are the glue that keeps our family intact. As Cece confirmed:

“...I remember when you and [Sarai] and them were small and y’all were coming up here, you know, started as a baby, and then, as you know, every year, you know, y’all was always here for the holidays...I don’t know how you look back at it now, and how you look at the house...[we have to get that back] we do...because we all we got, we losing the matriarchs and stuff...we all we got.”

Taken together, these reflections reveal that although the early food and food-making practices of our family were primarily motivated by physiological survival, they are now motivated by the survival of our family unit. With earlier generations of the women in our family no longer here to prepare the foods we once gathered around, these reflections suggest that it is now up to the family members who remain to maintain these recipes and traditions.

I view my family's recipes and food traditions as a connection to the past, present, and future. As we strive to maintain the foods of our ancestors for present and future generations, we not only maintain our living family, but also the family members who have passed on. Through these practices food becomes more than physiological nourishment, it becomes the primary source of our perpetuity, as well as a method of ancestral veneration. Our ancestors live on, not solely because of their legacies or lineage, but because they are still feeding us through the recipes and food dishes they once prepared. In this way, understanding that our ancestors, and thus their knowledge bestowed upon us, live and breathe through the foods and traditions we maintain, helps me understand that one day our elders of today will also live on through these

practices. This speaks directly to how the women in my family engage aliveness (Quashie, 2021) as they share their food and food-making practices with younger generations.

Although younger generations, and even generations of the future, may not have been able to physically meet earlier generations of women in our family, like Grandma Thelma, or Aunt Sheila, they are introduced to them through the foods they once prepared and the stories and memories that accompany them. This is confirmed by Saria who shared, “not only are recipes passed down from generation to generation, but the memory of those who have come before also gets passed down.” Based on the narratives of the women in my family, I view our family foods as embedded in wisdom, history, and knowledge of our survival and aliveness (Quashie, 2021). As we learn how to cook and prepare the recipes of our elders and ancestors, we therefore inherit this knowledge, reminding us of who we are, where we come from, and how we have made it. That is why the preservation of our foods and traditions is imperative. It maintains and strengthens our connection to family and the knowledge that has kept us for over five generations. And as our elders living today, will one day become ancestors of tomorrow, the maintenance of our family unit and kinship network heavily relies on the transmission of this knowledge to younger generations.

I turn to the reflections of my sister, Sarai, to further illustrate what is at stake for younger generations and the overall preservation of intergenerational knowledge in our family. Sarai offers an especially unique perspective as she represents the bridge between present and future generations as her daughter, Serenity, is a part of the ushering in of a new generation. As a new mother, Sarai is motivated by her upbringing where holidays were always spent on Josephine Street surrounded by family. In her reflections she shared:

“I was fortunate enough to experience what it is like to have family meals around

the holidays at my great-grandmother's house. Multiple generations were cooking, eating, and bonding in a 900-square-foot home. These are core memories that have shaped who I am today.”

As Sarai continued, she shared how these memories impact how she hopes to raise Serenity, so that she will also have the opportunity to develop close relationships and experiences learning from her grandmother, Tina, and great-grandmother, Queenie. She explained:

“Although my daughter will never get to meet my great-grandmother, I will be able to continue the tradition of bonding through family meals. She will learn from her great-grandmother and grandmother just as I did because we have preserved the traditions and recipes that continue to bring us together.”

The reflections of Sarai demonstrate not only her forward-thinking of how knowledge can continue to be preserved in the future, but also why it is important that this knowledge is preserved. Sarai confirms that in preserving intergenerational knowledge the food-making practices and traditions that keep our family connected also continue.

This understanding is largely attributed to holidays spent on Josephine where Sarai saw first-hand how food brings our family together and strengthens our connection to one another. This was further emphasized as she shared, “...I have seen how food has brought us together and kept us together.” Importantly, this firsthand experience has directly impacted Sarai's current approach to learning family recipes so that she is able to not only learn the knowledge of our elders but continue to pass it down. Sarai affirmed:

“For the longest time, I had not been interested in cooking the meals that are staples in our family, but since having my daughter, I have found it even more important to learn

from my grandmother and mother while they are still able to teach me what their mother and grandmother taught them.”

What stood out to me most about Sarai’s reflection was the phrase, “while they are still able to teach me” because it is a reminder that the women in my family are further motivated by an understanding of precarity and temporality. This is especially true for the younger generation, as Sarai and I witnessed how quickly our elders can pass on before you can have a chance to learn all that you might wish to know from them.

While Sarai might not have been initially interested in cooking traditional family foods, her understanding that this knowledge is important to pass on while also understanding that our family members will not always be here to teach us directly motivates her to be a proactive participant in the knowledge transfer process. This is further demonstrated by Sarai as she stated:

“Now that elders are aging, it’s even more important to spend time with them and soak up all the wisdom and knowledge they have to offer. If we don’t learn from them and spend time with them I fear we will lose our family traditions and recipes. If we aren’t learning from them how are we going to preserve the knowledge they have?”

The “fear” of losing family traditions and recipes, has led Sarai to be more intentional about her participation in the learning process. This intention is rooted in Sarai’s understanding that for younger generations, learning this knowledge happens when we bond and gather with elders as we laugh, talk, share stories, and memories while cooking and preparing food together. As a result, she described that she has tried many times to host family events that bring our family together and keep our traditions alive as she shares that “food can sometimes bridge the gap because we lean on each other when it comes time to replicate those dishes.” This is especially important as very few recipes in our family are written down. For this reason, spending time with

our elders is imperative to learning all that they have to offer. Unfortunately, not everyone in our family is motivated by these realizations. As Sarai shared, “they don’t realize the importance of making meaningful moments while we still have the elders here with us...which is why I feel the need to learn some of their recipes and ways of thinking.” In reflecting on the wisdom of Sarai, I found that in doing this work with her and other women in my family, my study became an important tool for the preservation of family traditions and intergenerational knowledge.

I originally came to this work wanting to explore how my family’s food and food-making practices serve as alternative forms of knowledge that are often excluded and marginalized in academic and educational settings. But with every conversation, observation, and artifact I engaged with I found an ever increasing sense of urgency to preserve and protect this knowledge. There are many women whom I would have loved to include in this study, but they passed away before I could speak to them or cook with them one last time. This made the urgency even more real for me, as someone who I thought I had so much time with, could be gone in the blink of an eye. And so, I did whatever I could to speak with the women who are still here with us, often driving out of state, spending entire days, afternoon, and evenings cooking and listening to their stories, and doing whatever it took to document the knowledge and practices that we often take for granted. As a result, my family and I were able to co-create a metanarrative (Lyotard, 1979) that functions as an archive of the knowledge and food-making practices, stories, recipes, and traditions that have kept us together and sustained our life and being.

In having our knowledge and food-making practices documented, the voices, stories, and recipes, that are stored in our hearts and memories get to live on in new ways. As this study preserves the intergenerational knowledge of the women in my family in a way it has not been preserved before, I feel an immense sense of pride and gratitude for the women who helped to

shape this study. I also feel an immense sense of hope in the future as the women in my family have come together to ensure that our food-making practices and traditions are continued. As the great-granddaughter of Thelma, the granddaughter of Queenie, and the daughter of Tina, I am thankful to come from such a dynamic lineage of women that whom without this study would not have been possible. Reflecting on my role as member of the younger generation of women in this family, I offer this study as a collection of the knowledge and food-making practices that have sustained us across generations.

Synthesis of Intergenerational Knowledge Findings

Collectively, these findings illustrate how the women in my family do not simply reproduce inherited knowledge but actively reshape it in response to changing circumstances. Knowledge of food procurement and preparation is, therefore, does not remain static or fixed. Rather, it emerges through ongoing processes of adaptation, interpretation, and negotiation across generations. The women draw on what they have learned from elders while also responding to the social and material realities and constraints of the present. In this way, knowledge is continuously reworked as women encounter new and changing social conditions, technological shifts, and evolving understandings of food, family, and life.

These adaptive processes emerge most clearly in moments when earlier practices become difficult or impossible to sustain exactly as they were created. When ingredients are no longer available, when time constraints or distance reshape daily routines, the women do not abandon intergenerational knowledge or tradition; they reconfigure them. Through substitutions, modifications, and reinterpretations, earlier forms of knowledge are extended into new contexts while still retaining connections to earlier generations. What results is not a simple preservation of tradition, but a form of continuity that is produced through constant change.

The findings in this section suggest that knowledge transmission within the family operates less as a linear passing down of fixed traditions and food-making practices, and more as a collaborative and adaptive process. Women across generations participate in shaping how knowledge is carried forward, drawing on memories of earlier practices, while also introducing new techniques, ingredients, and interpretations. As a result, the knowledge that circulates within the family reflects the layered contributions of multiple generations, each responding to the conditions of their own time.

Understanding intergenerational knowledge transmission in this way also highlights the collective dimensions of food-making practices. While particular individuals may serve as important teachers or key-knowledge holders, the broader system of knowledge is sustained through ongoing interaction among women across the family network. Conversations about recipes, demonstrations in kitchens, and shared reflections on past practices all contribute to the continual refinement and reinterpretation of food knowledge. Through these interactions, knowledge remains dynamic and responsive, rather than fixed in a single authoritative form.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the food-making practices of the women in my family function as a dynamic site of knowledge production and transmission. Knowledge is embodied through practice, shaped by lived experience, and continuously adapted in response to shifting material and social conditions. In this way, food and food-making operate not only as ordinary and everyday activities, but also as an important context through which knowledge is constructed, sustained, and shared across generations.

Conclusion of Findings

The findings presented in this chapter illuminate how knowledge about food and food-making is constructed, embodied, and transmitted within my extended kinship network. Across

generations, the women in my family engage in practices that transform everyday acts of cooking, preparing, and sharing food into important sites of learning and knowledge production. These practices reveal how knowledge circulates not only through explicit instruction but also through observation, participation, memory, and adaptation.

The patterns identified here also demonstrate that knowledge transmission within the family is deeply relational and shaped by the material conditions of everyday life. The women's practices show how knowledge is sustained through embodied participation, intergenerational interactions, and ongoing reinterpretation as circumstances change. Through these dynamic processes, food-making becomes a key mechanism through which knowledge is carried forward while remaining responsive to cultural, social, economic, and historical contexts.

In the next chapter, I build on these findings by examining their broader implication for understanding how these knowledge-making practices illuminate aliveness (Quashie, 2021) in everyday contexts. Drawing on Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 1990) and Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021), my final chapter situates the food-making practices of the women in my family within broader conversations about how Black women generate, sustain, and transmit knowledge that sustains not only survival, but Black life and being.

Summary of Findings

In this study, I examined the food and food-making practices of Black women in my extended kinship network to illuminate how knowledge is constructed, embodied, and transmitted intergenerationally. I explored everyday contexts where food, family, and knowledge-making converge, focusing on how these domains shape what knowledge is produced, sustained, and shared. While prior research has examined family narratives (Rowe, 2022; Stone, 1988; Thomas, 2020) and food literacy in education (Amin et al., 2018; Patel, 2009; Sutter et al., 2019; Vigden & Gallegos, 2014), less attention has been given to how food and family function together as epistemological sites where intergenerational knowledge is constructed and embodied.

This gap is significant because the knowledge-making practices of Black women have historically engaged their material and social worlds, with food and family serving as foundational domains through which they interpret and navigate structural oppression and violence (Nettles-Barcelón et al., 2015; Williams-Forson, 2006). In this context, knowledge shared through food is necessary for physiological survival and cultural continuity (Quashie, 2021). At its core, this study addresses the exclusion of Black women's knowledge practices from conventional educational research and praxis (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2006), responding to that concern by affirming their lived experiences and epistemic practices through the following guiding questions:

1. What intergenerational knowledge do the Black women in my family share, and what new knowledge do they create through food and food-making?
2. What do the stories they tell and uncover through their foods and food-making practices illuminate about Black aliveness?

The findings reveal three central patterns in the construction and transmission of knowledge within my family. First, women mainly create tacit, embodied knowledge, passed down from generation to generation. Second, this knowledge circulates within a flexible network, shaped by lived experiences and broader sociocultural and historical forces. Third, knowledge shifts and adapts as women respond to ongoing disruptions and changing material conditions. Together, these findings show that embodied food-making is a key site where knowledge is continually reconstructed in response to structural constraints and lived realities. In the next section, I analyze these patterns through Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 1990) and Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021).

Discussion

Drawing on Black feminist epistemology and Black aliveness, I look at these findings beyond family stories about getting and preparing food. With this theory, I see my family's food stories as key forms of knowledge Black women create and share to sustain Black life. I view food as a way knowledge is passed on, and food-making as a process that maintains a sense of aliveness. I argue that my family's food traditions are thoughtful efforts to keep culture alive, not just habits. These traditions show how aliveness is maintained daily, across generations.

Traditionally, scholars have described foodways as the social, cultural, and economic practices involved in the production and consumption of food (Anderson, 1971; Bennet, 1946; Camp, 1982; Wilson, 1973; Yoder, 1972). Early studies focused mainly on foodways within regions and ethnic groups, often neglecting how race and racism shaped these practices (Kuper, 1977; Lèvi-Strauss, 1966; Yoder, 1961). Today, many studies still overlook race in foodways (Guthman, 2008; Slocum, 2010; Reese & Cooper, 2021; Williams-Forson, 2006). This gap

reflects broader narratives that have misrepresented and devalued the food traditions of Black women across cultural, political, social, and material aspects (Nettles-Barcelón et al., 2015).

In recent decades, Black women scholars have shared their “food voices.” They show how Black women create and use food systems as spaces to resist ongoing violence and oppression. Scholars such as Nettles-Barcelón, Thorsson, Walker, and Williams-Forson argue that food enables Black women to define themselves, assert agency, and claim intellectual authority. In this study, I build on these scholars’ work by linking Black women’s foodways to Black feminist thought; I view foodways as rooted in ethics, knowledge, and care, shaping food traditions and recipes.

The narratives of Black women in my family show that their food and food-making practices are sustained through intergenerational knowledge transfer. Importantly, the women demonstrate that this knowledge is circular and bidirectional, as they reconstruct and rework it across generations through epistemic patchwork. This collaborative process allows them to maintain kinship bonds and food heritage through disruptions caused by structural changes, diagnoses, and shifts that impede knowledge transfer. I define epistemic rupture as the interruption or destabilization of expected pathways for intergenerational knowledge due to structural, material, or relational constraints.

In the World, Not of the World (Theoretical Framing)

To frame the analysis further, I use the lens of Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021) to situate epistemic rupture as a structural condition of anti-blackness. As Wilderson (2010) asserts, anti-blackness is born from the “paradigmatic impossibility” of Black humanity, as blackness is “the very antithesis of Human subject” (p. 9). Understanding the condition that positions Black life as

ontologically dead (Patterson, 1982) thus allows me to situate Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021) as persistence within that condition, rather than in contradiction to it.

Anti-blackness amplifies the structural impossibility in which aliveness persists (Quashie, 2021). As a theorization of Black suffering, anti-blackness also allows me to name epistemic rupture as a condition of larger antiblack systems of oppression. Death, illness, migration, and precarity are not coincidental but manifestations of a broader structure that positions Black life as vulnerable to interruption (Alexander, 1994; Dumas, 2016; Tillet, 2012; Wilderson, 2010; Williams, 1987). The literature supports the idea that access to food (Garth & Reese, 2020), the environment (Wright, 2021), health (Campbell, 2021), family structuring (Santos, 2023), and even death (Sexton, 2011; 2012) are all informed by ongoing antiblackness.

Having established anti-blackness as the structural condition rendering Black life perpetually vulnerable to epistemic rupture, I turn to Black aliveness as the lens through which I interpret these food-making practices (Quashie, 2021). Rather than reading the narratives solely as responses to constraint, I attend to how embodied, tacit, and adaptive knowledge enacts and sustains Black life across generations. As Quashie (2021) asserts, “every black one of us lives under the legacies of terror of modernity and coloniality—that no matter how differently we perceive or respond, terror is a condition of every black life” (p. 9). Despite this inevitable suffering, as the song says, *there’s a bright side somewhere* (Artists Index, 1995, p.189).

Williamson (2017) writes that Black life is more than the suffering that shapes it. It is the rich remains—a mix of resistance, resilience, and Black traditions. This does not mean anti-blackness or epistemic rupture are unimportant. It means we are more than just our pain. Even when called non-human, we are still alive. This is what the stories of the women in my family show as they echo the work of Quashie (2021), who states:

“The invocation of a black world is the operating assumption of black texts, a world where blackness exists in the tussle of being, in reverie and terribleness, in exception and in ordinariness. This black world is not one where the racial logics and harming predilections of anti-blackness are inverted but one where blackness is totality, where every human question and possibility is of people who are black” (pp. 1-2).

As I engage my family’s food stories and traditions as “text” (p. 10) rather than as poems and essays on Black worldness, I find Quashie’s (2021) framework for aliveness fundamental to understanding how the women in my family reckon with being *alive*.

I view the food and food-making practices of the Black women in my kinship network as manifestations of black world-making (Quashie, 2021). Within these capacious black worlds, the methods of knowledge production and preservation we employ are not confined by the logics and understandings of the outside world predicated on our disposability. In this way, I am comforted by the reminder that *we are in the world, but not of the world* (King James Bible, 1769, John 17:14). And as we are not of this world, we are not conformed to its ways. This knowledge, therefore, avails us an otherwise, an alternative, a way out of no way. With this in mind, I view the preservation of food traditions in my family as a commitment to black worlds that not only sustain cultural continuity but also aliveness (Quashie, 2021).

Grounded by the work of Raboteau (1978), I use the phrase “in the world not of it” as an analytic framing rather than a theological elucidation. Inspired by Raboteau’s (1978) description of the “invisible institution” (p. 212), this phrase attends to how Black communities have historically lived within oppressive social systems and structures, while also cultivating alternative forms of knowledge and cultural practices that exceed these conditions. Raboteau (1978) uses the institution of the church as one example of this. As Raboteau (1978) described:

“From the abundant testimony of fugitive and freed slaves, it is clear that the slave community had an extensive religious life of its own, hidden from the eyes of the master. In the secrecy of the quarters or the seclusion of the brush arbs (“hush harbors”), the slaves made Christianity truly their own” (p. 212).

Here, we see that those enslaved in the Antebellum South who accepted Christianity created their own faith and religious practices to create a separate world that was free from their oppressors (Raboteau, 1978). This often looked like illicit or informal prayer meetings on weeknights in the cabins of the enslaved. It also looked like “stealing away” (p. 213) to hold religious services in the woods, gullies, ravines, and thickets where the enslaved could preach, pray, sing, and “feel the spirit” (p. 218) in secrecy (Raboteau, 1978). This example shows that Black people have historically cultivated spaces of meaning, resistance, and spiritual autonomy that exceeded the structures and systems that held them in bondage.

This orientation shapes how I interpret my findings, understanding Black women’s food and food-making practices as situated within broader systems and structures of anti-blackness that produce and maintain social limitations and material constraints (Garth & Reese, 2020). However, these practices also exist within Black worlds that are shaped by knowledge-making practices that expand beyond these structures. As Raboteau (1978) suggests, these properties make these worlds “visible and invisible, formally organized and spontaneously adapted” (p. 212). In this way, I suggest that while the women in my family are *in the world* that subjects them to anti-black suffering and violence, they are not *of it* because they simultaneously exist within a separate black world that exceeds the logics of anti-blackness.

Analysis of Findings

In the sections that follow, I move from theoretical framing to analytic interpretation of the findings. Guided by Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021), I read the women's food-making practices not merely as cultural tradition or ordinary acts of cooking, but as enactments of being within conditions that render Black continuity perpetually vulnerable. Nevertheless, while anti-blackness names the structural condition shaping these women's lives, my analysis attends to how embodied, adaptive, and intergenerational knowledge practices sustain perpetuity across generations. Each finding is therefore interpreted as a site where knowledge production and aliveness converge in everyday practice.

Embodied and Tacit Knowledge Transmission

The findings indicated that the women in my family primarily construct and transmit knowledge in embodied and tacit ways. Recipes are rarely written, measurements are approximated with the senses, and directions are modeled through close and repeated observation. This mode of transmission reflects what Collins (1990) identifies as "lived experience as a criterion for meaning" (p. 257), as knowledge is validated through repeated acts in which the women learn to cook and prepare food by doing, watching, and remembering. In what follows, I interpret these embodied and tacit practices not only as epistemic methods but as enactments of Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021). In this study, I understand tacit knowledge as knowledge that cannot be fully articulated in propositional form, embodied knowledge as knowledge learned and enacted through the senses and the body, and relational knowledge as knowledge that is produced through shared presence and interaction. In the women's food-making practices, these forms converge.

During participant observation, I learned how to make greens without a formal recipe or set of instructions. Instead, I recall standing next to my mother, Tina, watching carefully as she added her freshly cleaned greens to her pot of smoked turkey that had been boiling for hours. “See, that’s what three bundles look like...see ‘em cooking?” is what she said as she directed me to begin stirring the greens. As she put the lid back on the pot, she told me that when the greens are “tender,” I will know that they are ready to go. Tina emphasized that no one ever gave her a recipe for greens; rather, she learned by experimenting, guided by her memory and senses. When Tina says the recipe lives in her heart, she locates knowledge within the body as both archive and obligation. This shows that her knowledge is not stored externally; it is carried, guarded, and activated through practice.

From the standpoint of Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 1990), this method of learning affirms that Black women's knowledge is anchored in lived experience. Tina does not know that the greens are ready because of the recipe instructions or because she used a timer. Rather, her extensive knowledge, gained from repeatedly preparing greens, allows her to recognize what they look, feel, smell, and taste like when they are ready. Tina’s experiences allow her to share more concrete knowledge with her children, as she tells me it usually takes about two hours for the greens to get tender, depending on how many bundles you are cooking. Knowledge circulates through embodied repetition and shared presence rather than through formal documentation.

The act of standing side by side with my mother, Tina, watching closely and being corrected mid-motion underscores the importance of shared presence and relationality. While these intimate moments seem ordinary, within the connection between mother and child, they are strengthened. Learning how to cook greens with Tina is not simply the acquisition of culinary

skills; it is the active participation in the continuity of family food traditions that informs a sense of responsibility and commitment to the past, present, and future. Tina is not just teaching me how to make greens to meet my physiological needs. Rather, she is ensuring that I will one day be able to pass this recipe on to the next generation. The act of teaching presumes continuation. To instruct a daughter in how to prepare greens is to assume that she will live long enough to cook them, that she will have someone to feed, and that there will be a future in which this knowledge remains relevant. In this way, embodied transmission enacts a commitment to Black futurity, even amid conditions that have historically rendered Black life precarious.

This is important because it reveals that Tina's posture of aliveness is shaped by futurity, where Black life continues to exist and be sustained. Importantly, this finding indicates to me that not only does Tina assume perpetuity to be ascertainable, but she also sees food as one way to maintain the family so that Black life continues. In this sense, embodied and tacit knowledge transmission functions as a vehicle of aliveness, allowing these commitments and responsibilities to future generations to be passed on even when structural conditions render such movement uncertain. Embodied knowledge, then, is not incidental to these women's food-making practices. It is a medium through which intergenerational knowledge is sustained. As the knowledge lives on, so do the ancestors and elders of our family.

Adaptive Kinship Networks as Responses to Epistemic Rupture

The second finding indicated that knowledge transmission in my family is not exclusively secured through biological lineage. When proximity to biological kin is limited, women do not simply experience a deficit in access to knowledge. Instead, they construct alternative relational pathways through which knowledge can circulate. I conceptualize this process as the formation of adaptive kinship networks in response to epistemic rupture.

In this study, epistemic rupture does not necessarily mean total loss. Rather, it can also refer to a disruption in expected channels of transmission, such as the inability to learn directly from biological family members due to distance, mobility, or shifting life circumstances. For Tina, limited proximity to her biological relatives meant that everyday opportunities to watch and learn how to prepare family recipes were not readily available. However, instead of interpreting this distance as final, she cultivated extended kin relationships that became sites of knowledge transfer.

Aunt Marie Lou entered Tina's life as affinal kin after her marriage, but their relationship deepened through repeated interaction and proximity. Tina frequently requested her lemon poundcake when visiting, and through the relational closeness they developed, Aunt Marie Lou eventually gifted her the recipe. The transfer of knowledge was not automatic or guaranteed; it emerged from cultivated intimacy and demonstrated intentionality. In this example, knowledge was first earned and then shared relationally.

Importantly, the knowledge transmission process did not stop here. Tina continued to reconstruct and refine it alongside Mrs. Mouzon, a non-biological, yet proximal elder in her extended kinship network. Through shared experimentation, adjustment, and sensory calibration, the recipe became a collaborative production. The final version of the lemon poundcake recipe Tina prepares bears the imprint of multiple women connected by knowledge of affinal and fictive kin, held together by Tina's embodied memory. This process is what I describe as epistemic patchwork. Importantly, this patchwork is not creativity for creativity's sake. Nor is it improvisation solely rooted in taste and aesthetics. Rather, it is the product of Tina responding to being away from her biological family.

This demonstrates that when traditional biological pathways are constrained, knowledge survives through the expansion of kinship networks. This adaptive structure compensates for rupture by widening the network of transmission. Read through Black feminist epistemology, as articulated by Collins (1990), this finding underscores that knowledge production is socially situated and collectively validated. Authority does not depend solely on biological connection; it can also be sustained through community recognition, proximity, and relationality. Tina's knowledge is legitimate not because it is sourced through her genealogy, but because it is collectively and refined through chosen elders who also serve as epistemic authorities.

Interpreted through Black aliveness (2021), the stakes of this adaptive labor are deepened. The deliberate construction of extended kin networks signals an insistence on continuity despite structural instability. To cultivate affinal and community-based kinship relationships as sites of knowledge is to refuse epistemic isolation. It is to assert that Black life will be sustained not only through inheritance but also through intentional relationship-building.

This adaptive network, then, is not secondary to biological transmission; it is an expansion of the knowledge network that ensures survival when women extend beyond their network. By intentionally developing and sustaining close relationships with Aunt Marie Lou and Mrs. Mouzon, Tina operationalizes aliveness by creating a new village that supports and sustains her in the absence of her biological family. The lemon poundcake recipe persists because Tina's network of knowledge persists. Thus, epistemic patchwork serves as a maintenance strategy when knowledge cannot be shared through proximity. In this way, knowledge is not preserved through static replication, but through deliberate reconstruction within these extended kinship networks. What might appear as a deviation from origin is, in fact, the method through which continuity is secured.

Change, Continuity, and the Doing of Aliveness

The final finding of this study centered on transformation. Across generations, the recipes do not remain fixed. Ingredients shift. Measurements adjust. Cooking times are recalibrated. Smoked turkey replaces hamhock. Sugar is reduced. Recipes are written and recorded. Techniques are modified to accommodate new environments and food landscapes, health constraints, and the preservation of knowledge. At first glance, these changes might be read as evidence of loss or departure from tradition. However, the data suggested that change does not signal cultural erosion; it signals aliveness (Quashie, 2021).

To consider whether change constitutes loss is to assume that authenticity requires recipes to remain unchanged. However, the women in my family do not treat recipes as static artifacts to be preserved in their original form. Rather, they treat recipes as living practices that respond to present conditions. When Tina and Josefina Iris modify an ingredient or adjust their techniques, they are not abandoning the traditions they inherited. Rather, they are recalibrating recipes to their current realities. The recipe remains recognizable while also being responsive.

This adaptability reflects the situated nature of Black women's knowledge (Collins, 1990). As Collins (1990) asserts, knowledge is produced within lived contexts and must remain accountable to those contexts. As material conditions change, so too must the practices that sustain life within them. The women's willingness to alter recipes demonstrates not a weakening of epistemic commitment, but a deep attentiveness to their social and bodily environments.

This finding also complicated my assumption that preservation requires exact replication. In the data, continuity is maintained not through the identical reproduction of recipes, but through intentional transmission of core values and traditions. The taste profile, the method of preparation, the expectation of certain dishes at family gatherings, and the responsibility to teach

the next generation remain intact even as specific ingredients and techniques change. What is preserved is not only the recipe, but the relational and ethical commitments attached to it.

Read through the lens of Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021), change becomes evidence of the durability and vitality of our interior worlds. The women demonstrate that aliveness requires a capacity to adapt while remaining grounded in one's ethical and relational commitments. When a recipe evolves, it suggests that the family is actively negotiating the present rather than merely reproducing the past. The alteration of ingredients in response to health needs, availability, or preference reflects a desire to sustain life under current conditions.

Importantly, the women do not describe these changes as betrayal. They describe them as adjustments, refinements, or improvements. The language they use indicates stewardship rather than abandonment. To steward a recipe is to care for it over time, which necessitates responding to social and material change. A recipe that cannot change is a recipe that cannot be carried across time and space. A tradition that cannot respond to current conditions cannot be maintained. Change, then, is not the opposite of continuity. It is the mechanism that secures continuity.

Within the women's food-making practices, change marks an ongoing commitment to sustaining Black life in shifting contexts. The recipe changes because the family changes. The family changes because conditions change. However, the obligation to nourish, gather, and teach remains. Thus, the consideration is not whether recipes change, but what that change reveals. In this study, change reveals attentiveness, relational accountability, and futurity. It reveals that the women are not simply preserving inherited knowledge but actively maintaining it. Change, in this context, is not loss. It is evidence that the knowledge remains in use, and as long as it does,

the family remains alive. In this way, as recipes evolve and are refined, what remains the same is the commitment to family and perpetuation.

Food-Making as Infrastructure for Black Aliveness (Synthesis)

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the food and food-making practices of the Black women in my family function as more than cultural tradition or culinary expertise. They operate as infrastructure for sustaining Black life within conditions structured by anti-blackness. While anti-blackness produces vulnerability to interruption, distance, and loss, the women's embodied, tacit, and adaptive knowledge practices reveal how Black life is maintained across generations. Through embodied transmission, extended kinship networks, and adaptive modifications, knowledge does not merely survive structural rupture; it thrives. It is deliberately carried, reconstructed, and recalibrated to ensure continuity.

This study contributes to existing scholarship by bringing Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 1990) and Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021) into sustained conversation within the domain of everyday food practices. While scholarship has documented the material inequities shaping Black food access (Garth & Reese, 2020), and while Black feminist theory has long affirmed lived experience as a site of knowledge production (Collins, 1990), this study demonstrates how everyday food-making practices operate as both an epistemic method and a commitment to aliveness (Quashie, 2021).

By conceptualizing epistemic rupture as structurally conditioned and patchwork as a necessary response rather than aesthetic improvisation, this study reframes adaptation as evidence of aliveness (Quashie, 2021). Embodiment is not incidental. Kinship expansion is not supplementary. Change does not equate loss. Each represents a distinct mechanism through which Black life persists. In this way, the women's practices illuminate how aliveness is

operationalized in everyday spaces that are often overlooked within broader theoretical discussions of Black knowing and being.

Ultimately, this project argues that the preservation of my family's food traditions is inseparable from the preservation of Black worlds. These worlds are cultivated within, but not reducible to, the logics of anti-blackness. Through cooking, learning, adjusting, and gathering, the women sustain relational networks, ethical commitments, and embodied knowledge archives that ensure perpetuity. It is enacted daily, at the stove, at the table, and in the intimate labor of feeding on another. In the following section, I offer implications for future research and practice.

Implications

This study examined the food and food-making practices of Black women in my family to understand how knowledge is created and shared intergenerationally. Through this analysis, I argued that everyday food spaces function as sites of knowledge production as the women learn to procure and prepare food from biological, affinal, and fictive kin. As recipes and culinary methods change across generations, the adaptability of my family's food practices demonstrates the responsiveness of intergenerational knowledge rather than epistemic loss. By situating these practices within frameworks of Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 1990) and Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021), the study illuminates that everyday foods and food-making practices are a critical archive of Black life and being.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the immediate context of my family. In this section, I call for expanding how aliveness is theorized, how Black feminist epistemologies are recognized within educational research, and how scholars approach research conducted with kin. In what follows, I outline three areas of implication: first, expanding theorizations of Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021); second, studying Black feminist epistemologies (Collins, 1990) in

educational contexts; and third, conducting research with families. Together, these implications clarify broader theoretical, disciplinary, and methodological contributions of this study.

Implications for Expanding Theorizations of Black Aliveness

My examination of aliveness in this study expands Quashie's (2021) conceptualization of Black being and worldness beyond Black feminist literary texts. I begin by answering Quashie's (2021) call to "imagine a black world" (p. 14) that surpasses black death. As I participated in this ontological exercise, my imagination led me to my family's home on Josephine during the holidays. If aliveness is "a quality of being, a term of habitat, a manner and aesthetic, a feeling—or many of them, circuits in an atmosphere. Like breath" (Quashie, 2021, p. 14), then Josephine is the only place I have ever felt *alive*. In those moments when I was insulated by family members who filled every corner of the house and the foods that would not have tasted the same anywhere else, I did not feel the weight of my blackness, and therefore the detachment from humanity. Nor did I have to be an enlightened and reasoned human. Here, in my imaginings of Josephine, I was able just to be, to exist, to breathe. Through this exercise, I found that Josephine taught me what Black worlds can look and feel like before I even began engaging with Black feminist literature. In this way, I cite my memories of holidays spent on Josephine as my starting point for understanding aliveness beyond these literary contexts and beyond structural anti-blackness.

This is not to say that Black feminist literary texts are unimportant in our theorizations of aliveness (Quashie, 2021), but rather that so is lived experience. As Quashie (2021) draws heavily from Black feminist literary texts, often citing the works of Lucille Clifton and Toni Morrison, this recommendation is supported by the work of Black feminist scholars who assert that the work of Black women writers is primarily written from the standpoint of Black women

and their collective realities (Christian, 1983; Collins, 1990; Walker, 1983). This context matters because, as these texts inform how Quashie (2021) understands aliveness, they are also shaped by the conditions that necessitated the theorizing of aliveness. In this way, I view imaginations of Black being and worldness as possible not just because they are “the operating assumptions of black texts” (Quashie, 2021, p. 1), but also because these texts were once lived. I, therefore, suggest that theorizations of Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021) be extended by engaging additional texts that are also lived and experienced to capture the capaciousness and fullness of Black life.

As Zafar (2019) asserts, “since the earliest African American authors wrote poems, life histories, and essays, Black Americans have been writing their way to freedom and self-reliance” (p. 1). Zafar (2019) also suggests that Black chefs and cooks, some of whom were also writers, used their culinary knowledge and literacy to create cookbooks, guides, novels, and memoirs that served as new literary forms, thus making Black culinary worlds visible. In this study, I build on Zafar's (2019) work to situate my family's embodied and recorded recipes as a form of text that illustrates foodways and food landscapes that sustain perpetuity. I use these texts to further support my conceptualization of the manifestation and imagination of Black worlds that sustain Black being and aliveness (Quashie, 2021). I view food and recipes as foundational, living texts that engage geography, time, place, and knowledge-making (McKay, 2023), making Black life and being possible. As the recipes in my family live and breathe alongside us and across generations, I found them to offer deep insights into how we might imagine the ethical and relational commitments to aliveness and worldmaking.

Through the narratives of the women in my family, I find that they maintain their aliveness (Quashie, 2021) through adaptations that preserve the structural integrity of their worlds. This is shown through Lulu and Saria recording elders as they prepare recipes, ensuring

this knowledge is preserved for future generations. This is also demonstrated by Queenie, who writes down her Aunt Pete's pocket roll recipe for her grandchildren. Ensuring that our family recipes are well-preserved means that our food traditions continue. In my family, food traditions serve as important rituals that fuel and energize the interiority of their world. In this way, food traditions are the main energy source for our world and thus the fuel for our aliveness. Without this energy source, or with it weakened, our world becomes vulnerable.

I use this metaphor to suggest that aliveness requires ongoing responsiveness. It is not capitulation to the outside world. It is in the elasticity and fluidity of our interventions that we use to maintain aliveness. In this way, this theorization of aliveness moves beyond the conditions of aliveness towards its maintenance (Quashie, 2021). This is an important intervention because although life and being are ascertained in the Black world, at times, we are forced to contend with the social and material conditions of the external world, engulfed by anti-blackness. However, with knowledge of interventions that can protect our Black worlds from external forces, we not only deepen our understanding of aliveness but also learn how to preserve it.

These insights were made possible by examining family recipes shared and modified across generations. Although these recipes are specific to my family, they offer larger implications for how aliveness can be further theorized and expanded. As scholars continue this work, they should begin by examining aliveness through texts that offer insights into Black life and being, as well as the construction of Black worlds. For Quashie (2021), this looked like examining Black feminist literary texts. This looked like examining recipes as texts. Scholars who follow should follow the path forged by Quashie (2021), bringing along the texts that speak to them and shape their posture of aliveness. In doing so, we might continue to expand our understanding of aliveness and the actualization of Black life and being.

Implications for Studying Black Feminist Epistemologies in Educational Contexts

The narratives of the Black women in my family shared in this study validate the knowledge that Black women produce and share in everyday contexts. I attribute this to my theoretical lens, grounded in Black feminist epistemologies, which strengthened my research methods and practices in this study. This framing ensured that I did not detach the Black women in my family from the contexts in which their knowledge is produced (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2000). As a result of this engagement, I effectively highlight the alternative ways of knowing in my kinship structure. I use the research practices that I used to conduct this study as an example of what educational research looks like when it is rooted in the social and material realities and knowledge of Black women (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2000).

Despite narratives of Black women functioning as sources of specialized knowledge, these narratives have often been excluded as legitimate forms of knowledge in conventional educational research contexts (Dillard, 2000, p. 664). For this reason, much of what we know about Black women's knowledge-making practices has been learned through alternative sites and disciplines that extend beyond the field of education (Dillard, 2000). The exclusion and under-theorization of Black women's epistemologies in educational research is significant because it is reflective of a larger history of the marginalization and oppression of Black women and girls (Griffin & Turner, 2021; Muhammad & Haddix, 2016; Ricks, 2014). Despite being pushed to the margins of society, Black women have continued to use their voices to speak up for themselves, their community, and the future (Collins, 1990). As Christian (1985) asserts, "if black women don't say who they are, other people will and say it badly for them...Silence is hardly golden...When we speak and answer back we validate our experiences. We say we *are* important, if only to ourselves" (p. xxi).

In agreement with Collins (1990), I assert that the important work of validating our own experiences and forms of knowledge must also include the knowledge of Black women “who are not commonly perceived as intellectuals” (p. 14). The Black women featured in my study are rarely regarded as intellectuals or scholars in the conventional sense. However, in the context of my study, their ingenuity and rich epistemic practices legitimize them as experts in their own right. The kitchens and gardens of these women functioned as laboratories where knowledge was advanced and transmitted through experimentation and observation. The preservation of recipes and food traditions across generations became a repository of pedagogical practices. In uplifting the women in my family as holders of knowledge, my study affirmed that the epistemologies of Black women need not be validated by anyone other than the ordinary Black women who have lived the experiences they are experts on (Collins, 1990).

In the context of educational research, this is important because traditional learning spaces are oftentimes sites of suffering for Black children, and especially Black girls (Griffin & Turner, 2021; Muhammad & Haddix, 2016; Ricks, 2014). A Black feminist epistemological stance, therefore, insists that as Black women who were once Black girls, we share an ethical and collective responsibility to protect the potential and being of Black girls (Collins, 1990; Lomax, 2025). As Black girls experience gendered and racialized oppression, without the protections afforded by age, the well-being of Black girls needs to have Black women who support them in navigating oppression and developing positive self-definitions and valuations (Collins, 1990).

The narratives of the women in my study revealed that the context in which knowledge was produced was shaped by care and shared responsibility. As the women recalled learning to cook, they emphasized the care and support they received from older generations. They also emphasized close relationships sustained by proximity, which strengthened their bonds with

elders. As we consider how to support Black girls in educational contexts, we should model learning environments on community spaces shaped by care, support, and proximity to Black women who not only support the production and transmission of knowledge but also the livelihoods of Black girls. Importantly, this study further suggests that these learning environments need not be in traditional educational settings.

As Black women scholars continue to conduct educational research that engages Black feminist epistemologies, they should also engage ordinary Black women and girls in ordinary contexts where the learning process is collective and ethically oriented. I offer this implication specifically for Black women scholars because our lived experiences as both Black and women equip us with specialized practices and knowledge we have fashioned from our own standpoints (Collins, 1990). I say this not to suggest that the experiences of all Black women are the same, or to infer that we know everything there is to know about Black women and girls. Rather, I am suggesting that we use this knowledge to conduct research that supports and validates our brilliance and wonder. As Alice Walker (1983) suggests, we should write not only what we want to read or see, but what we should have been able to read all along.

Implications for Conducting Research with Family

A substantial body of research cautions against common ethical and methodological assumptions in conducting family research (Dami & Warren, 1995; Greenstein & Davis, 2021; Horowitz et al., 2002). This guidance is largely motivated by the actions of researchers who far too often have “used at-risk populations to achieve their own goals without considerations for participants’ rights, needs, and goals” (Dami & Warren, 1995, p. 188). For this reason, scholars such as Dami and Warren (1995) ultimately suggest that those who wish to engage in family

research begin by analyzing their conscious and unconscious motivations for conducting this research. For me, this process looked like reflecting on how this study originally came to me.

Collins (1990) asserts, “even after substantial mastery of dominant epistemologies, many Black women scholars invoke our own lived experiences and those of other African American women in selecting topics for investigation and methodologies used” (p. 258). This was especially true for me as I completed my graduate studies. Although “experience as a criterion for meaning” (Collins, 1990, p. 258) has long been established as an epistemic value for many Black women, I found that there were very few intellectual and academic spaces that honored this assertion. Thus, I turned to alternative spaces to further explore and engage with Black women's knowledge practices. This search to be affirmed led me to the largest collective of Black women that I had direct access to, my kinship network. As I turned inward to my family to learn more about how this particular group of Black women created and shared knowledge, I gained deeper insights into how family research is conducted and why it is important.

Admittedly, when I originally began my study, I underestimated the complexity of conducting family research. As a member of my family, I assumed my insider position was a strength that also gave me access to insider knowledge. To a degree, it did. At the same time, I found myself positioned as an outsider, which affected how I designed and conducted this study. As both a family member and a researcher, I found myself constantly navigating power dynamics and challenges that threatened not only my study but also my family.

One of the first challenges that arose was determining which family members would participate in this study and how they would be selected. As Dami and Warren (1995) suggest, “a clear definition of family is essential to the design and implementation of any family study” (p. 190). In defining what family means in the context of my study, it was important to consider the

sociocultural and historical context of the formation of Black families as they are defined by “complicated overlaps between location, functional relations, shared values, affiliations, and blood ties” (Allen & James, 1998, p. 3). This is especially true for my family, as biological, affinal, and fictive kinship bonds connect the women in this study. Given this cultural context, I ensured that my definition of family remained broad enough to encompass the expansiveness of my kinship network.

The next challenge that I navigated was maintaining the confidentiality of the women in my family. As LaRossa et al. (1981) assert, maintaining confidentiality can be particularly challenging in qualitative research. This was especially true for me as I began analyzing and writing the findings for this study. Although the women in my family were all given pseudonyms, the descriptions of their environments, relationships with other women, and shared narratives offer glimpses of visibility that could compromise the women's confidentiality. This was an important ethical consideration for me as I decided how much to share and what information to change to maintain confidentiality. For example, when Queenie talks about moving away from home when she got married and started her family, I did not include her home address to protect her anonymity. This is especially important, as Queenie’s age makes her vulnerable to data breaches and scams (James et al., 2014).

In addition to protecting the confidentiality of my family members to the best of my ability, I also had to carefully navigate the emotions that arose as they shared their recipes and memories on food and family. For many of the women in my family, the stories and memories they shared were connected to deep, and at times unresolved, emotions tied to their upbringing, relationships with other family members, and material conditions. This speaks directly to Dami and Warren’s (1995) claim that “research on sensitive family issues has the potential to raise

difficult emotional issues for researchers as well for families” (p. 190). To overcome this challenge, I was often required to do care work for myself and my family members during and after data collection. This often looked like pausing observations or conversations to give the women a moment to process without being recorded. It looked like letting the women speak freely and then deciding which parts of the conversation could be used and which should be redacted. It looked like writing about tensions carefully and objectively, giving grace and respect to multiple women who experienced the same event very differently. However, most impactful for me was caring for the women and myself after these emotional moments. For Josefina Iris and me, this was having a mimosa together after our recorded conversation. For Lainey, it looked like us taking a nap on the couch when we finished recording. For me, it looked like journaling after each data collection session to process the range of emotions that came up. Importantly, the inclusion of care practices tailored to each woman in my family was not only an ethical consideration based on their role as family members, but also due to their vulnerabilities as Black women who are susceptible to harm caused by researchers (Dami & Warren, 1995, p. 188).

In reflecting on my methodological approaches to conducting research with my family, it is important to note that my methods were guided by a theoretical lens rooted in Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 1990) and Black aliveness (Quashie, 2021). Aligning my methods with these frameworks ensured that I was ethically engaging with the women in my family as legitimate knowledge authorities worthy of respect, protection, and agency. This meant letting the women speak for themselves and clarifying claims made rather than relying on my own interpretations and beliefs. It also meant acknowledging that I know the women in my family in terms of our relational dynamics, but that I do not know them fully as women with their own lived experiences and interpretations of family and food. In this way, when conducting family

research, researchers should select theoretical frameworks that not only guide their research methods but also hold them accountable to the communities in which they are researching.

Also, researchers should reflect deeply and critically on what is at stake for the family they are conducting research with, as well as what they seek to gain from participating in their study. Given the long history of the surveillance, extraction, and commodification of Black women, this was an especially important ontological consideration of my study (Collins, 1990; Cooper, 1982; Hughes, 2019; Forbes, 2009; May, 2021; Williams, 2023). Although learning and exchange are made possible by producing “intelligible” (p. 5) work, legibility also facilitates capture, co-optation, and at times, violence (Ryan, 2025). Thus, I relied on the women in my family and their discernment to guide me through this process. They decided what they wanted to share and what they did not. They decided which recipes were important to discuss and which ingredients and directions to omit. In doing so, my family and I demonstrate a broader process of negotiating legibility and strategically sharing knowledge, giving close attention to the stakes of visibility.

The methods and theoretical frameworks employed in this study were tailored to the women in my family. This approach is rooted in fidelity and accountability, as the women whose narratives I share have fed and cared for me. Although I navigated methodological challenges as a researcher, my ethical and relational commitments to my family motivated me to develop and employ methods that would not compromise their integrity, confidentiality, or overall well-being. This is a major strength of the study. For other researchers engaged in family research, ethical and relational commitments are not only well-established but also aligned with a strong theoretical framing that provides the structure and accountability needed to overcome methodological challenges and issues that may arise.

Limitations

While this study offers a deep examination of food and food-making practices within my extended kinship network, several limitations shape the scope, replicability, and interpretation of its findings. Rather than diminishing the study's contributions, these limitations clarify its boundaries and identify areas for further scholarly engagement.

Scope

This study centers on a single extended family of Black women. The findings, therefore, reflect the particular histories, migration patterns, traditions, social and material conditions, and interpersonal dynamics of this specific kinship network. The practices described here cannot be generalized to all Black families, nor do they claim to represent the full breadth of Black women's culinary skills and knowledge-making practices. Rather, the knowledge-making practices highlighted in this study are rooted in the women's specific lived experiences. This means that the claims in this study are not meant to be generalized beyond this specific context, as Black women are not a monolith (Collins, 1990). The patterns identified here should thus be understood as context-dependent and not fully transferable to the examination of Black women's knowledge practices in their entirety. Future research engaging Black women and families across other contexts and lived experiences may illuminate both convergences and divergences in how Black women create and share knowledge through food and food-making practices.

Positionality

A second limitation concerns my positionality as both a researcher and a family member. As an insider, I possess intimate knowledge of relational histories, tensions, recipes, and embodied practices that might remain inaccessible to an external researcher. This proximity supported the richness and profundity of my interpretation and contextual depth. At the same

time, this position makes interpretation complex. My closeness to the women in my family shaped what the women chose to share, withhold, and emphasize. It also contributed to assumptions of shared understanding, leaving some meanings implicit rather than explicitly articulated.

Black feminist intellectual traditions emphasize that speaking from one's standpoint is not a weakness, but a political and epistemic stance that legitimizes the ways Black women co-construct knowledge collectively and through lived experience (Collins, 1990). As both an insider and an outsider, I had to constantly engage in reflexivity to avoid imposing my own assumptions, beliefs, or interpretations on the women in my family. Although my interpretations are inevitably shaped by memory, affective ties, and my own investments in preserving my family's knowledge and food traditions, this reflexivity ensures that the data presented is accurate and true to the experiences of the women in my family. Thus, while my insider-outsider positionality enriched this study, it also means that the findings are co-constructed through relationships that extend beyond conventional and formalized research frameworks.

Reliance on Narrative and Retrospective Accounts

Much of the data in this study draws on food stories, memories, and retrospective reflections. As the women relied heavily on their memories, accounts of how recipes were learned, modified, or transmitted may not align neatly with historical chronology. However, because I am concerned with meaning and knowledge-making rather than complete historical accuracy, the interpretations of the women's memories still offer accurate and important insights into the knowledge they value, preserve, and share. This is emphasized by what the women emphasize, omit, reinterpret, and share. Still, this reliance on retrospective accounts is worth nothing as it limits the study's ability to verify specific timelines or trace exact moments of

knowledge transmission. Future research might incorporate more longitudinal observation or archival artifacts, such as recipes or cookbooks, to further illuminate how food and knowledge-making evolve across generations.

Reflection on Limitations

Taken together, these limitations clarify that this study does not seek universality, objectivity detached from location, or exhaustive coverage of all dimensions of Black feminist epistemologies. Instead, it offers a situated, relational, and theoretically grounded account of how one extended kinship network constructs and transmits the knowledge necessary to sustain Black life. By naming these limitations, I underscore both the specificity and the integrity of this study. Its contributions lie not in the breadth of generalization, but in the depth of illumination. The boundaries of the study are, therefore, also its strengths. Its commitment to relational accountability, attention to embodied knowledge, and centering of the everyday knowledge-making practices of Black women offer deep insight into how food serves as a conduit of knowledge in my family.

Conclusion

In this study, I examine how Black women in my extended kinship network create, share, and preserve knowledge through foodways. What began as an inquiry into recipes and family stories developed into a study of how knowledge is formed, validated, reconstructed, and transferred outside of formalized knowledge institutions and beyond conventional frameworks. Across generations, the women in this study demonstrated that food-making is not simply domestic labor or cultural tradition. It is a site of intellectual work and epistemic rigor. Through embodied practices, sensory evaluations, storytelling, and shared responsibility, the women construct and circulate knowledge necessary for aliveness (Quashie, 2021). Recipes are rarely

written down, yet they are memorized. Techniques are not formally taught; they are learned through observation and experimentation. Authority is not assigned through schooling or credentials, but through demonstrations of mastery and expertise that validate competence.

In documenting these food practices, this study contributes to conversations on Black feminist epistemology by providing a narrative account of how knowledge-making unfolds in everyday contexts. Rather than locating knowledge solely in institutional settings, this research situates it within kitchens, gardens, and family networks. It shows that lived experience, close relationality, and care function not as abstract principles but as criteria for evaluating and validating knowledge.

This study also expands the analytic terrain of educational research. As a field, we acknowledge community-based knowledge and family literacies while still centering schooling as the primary site of learning. The findings here suggest that knowledge-making is not confined to the classroom. It also occurs in alternative spaces where food and family converge as younger generations learn how to observe, adapt, interpret, and respond to shifting material conditions. These learning processes are not supplemental to formal education, but rather, they precede and shape how individuals move through institutional contexts.

At a broader level, this research challenges prevailing regimes of truth that determine what counts as knowledge and who is authorized to produce it. When food and food-making practices are dismissed as informal or apolitical, the knowledge embedded within them is rendered invisible. By centering Black women's foodways as knowledge-making practices, this study repositions these women not as cultural informants but as theorists of their own lives.

Ultimately, this dissertation affirms that Black women's everyday practices constitute a holistic, situated, and sustained theory of knowing. These practices have endured without

institutional endorsement, and in many cases despite institutional disregard. By bringing these epistemic traditions into conversation with educational research, this study further legitimizes Black women's knowledge-making practices. This work, therefore, concludes with a reorientation in how we think about Black education. If we are to seriously understand how to support the alternative knowledges of Black women and girls, we must attend to the everyday sites where Black women have long been teaching, learning, revising, and sustaining knowledge that in turn sustains life. If we do, we will find that these practices do not supplement theory, but they are theory, and they have been all along.

Appendix A

Codebook

Parent Code	Child Code	Definition	Notes
RQ1: What intergenerational knowledge do the Black women in my family share, and what new knowledge do they create through food and food-making?			
Intergenerational Knowledge Transmission	Who taught?	ELDERS (Mothers/Grandmothers/Auntie/Othermothers)	TINA "I learned how to cook by hanging out at nanny's house and watching her." QUEENIE "But mama loved to cook. Mama loved to bake bread. I think it just came natural to her. But she could bake some bread." "Aunt Gladys would make lemon pies. Alice used to make the cakes and things for Thanksgiving." - Queenie talked about how her mom and aunts learned to garden and how they then taught her how to garden. "Now that [gardening] they got from their mother. Yes, that's how they learned I do know that." LAINIEY "Your grandmother, Mama, relied on Phyllis as a cook. I ain't do anything, I'd watch. I was slow for one, even after growing up, getting married and everything, Sheila would put me out of the kitchen till I learned on my own." "She was yeah, she did the most, she did the cooking. Mama relied on her. Because I remember mama saying when Phyllis left...she finally left, 'she said, my ace. She said, there's my ace. My ace is gone.' Yeah Mama Said that!" LULU - Lulu describes how the cooking traditions as we know them came from grandma Thelma and her sisters, who learned from their mother, great-grandma Marie. "I think it would be Thelma and her sisters, because, you know, they were very close, even though they argue a lot, they were close. So they were close, so I think it would start with them. [and they learned from who?] From their mother." "Leslie learned from our aunt Hattie, which she called Nanny. She learned from her." - Lulu reflect on how her aunt, grandma, and great aunts worked on the culinary ministry at Zion Baptist Church on Josephine Street. "Aunt Estelle and them did it. Yeah, Aunt Estelle, Sheila. Your grandma Thelma used to help in the kitchen and Mr. Bob Reynolds down the road...because you know they always helped in the kitchen."

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