“NOT BACKING DOWN”: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY
OF BLACK WOMEN TEACHERS
IN URBAN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Recent events— including the overlapping pandemics of hyper-visible racism, police brutality, economic downturn, climate crises, and the Covid-19 virus— have reified the significance of teacher diversity to counter structural inequalities in education. Of particular concern are low-income urban schools. While greater teacher diversity exists in urban schools, Black teachers— and Black women in particular— experience high turnover compared to their white and male counterparts. Through a contextual analysis of Black women teachers, the purpose of this study was to explore intersectionality and identity negotiation by investigating whether professional experiences and decision-making were moderated by ethno-racial and gender identities. Multiple sources of data were collected regarding eight self-identified Black women of the African diaspora with at least two years of experience in urban schools. Analysis of demographic surveys, open-ended responses, and three rounds of semi-structured interviews yielded ten themes: 1) supplementing curriculum with counter-narratives and role models, 2) facilitating conversations about race-related current events, 3) teaching the truth about American history, 4) guiding students to navigate a racialized society, 5) experiencing micro-aggressions in interracial interactions, 6) disengaging from diversity initiatives, 7) participating in supportive intra-racial relationships, 8) avoiding gendered racial stereotypes, 9) pursuing desired ends, and 10) redefining professionalism. The result of this study adds to the research base regarding intersectionality and identity negotiation as factors influencing teachers of color in urban schools. Additional recommendations are also given to guide research, practice, and policy.
Key words: Identity negotiation; Intersectionality; Black women teachers; Teacher diversity; Teachers of color; Black Feminist Thought
DEDICATION

To Ana, Felisha, Annie, Jay, Jannell, Beyoncé, Anne, Mo, Julia, Omi, and Camile

Thank you for graciously entrusting me with your stories

and for your service to our children.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Extensive research has shown that ethno-racial diversity among the teacher workforce positively influences student educational experiences and academic outcomes (Achinstein et al., 2010; Banerjee, 2018). It has previously been observed that ethno-racial diversity in the teacher workforce enhances the democratic function of schooling in American society (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Despite these arguments and recent policy efforts to increase the ethno-racial diversity of the teacher workforce, researchers determine that teachers of color experience substantive rates of turnover (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll et al., 2019).

Central to this discussion of teacher turnover is low-income urban schools, which often reflect neighborhood segregation by race and class (Fuller et al., 2019; Owens, 2020), are characterized by challenging work conditions (Kozol, 1991; Milner & Lomotey, 2013), and comprise a higher proportion of the ethno-racially diverse teachers than suburban and rural schools (Di Carlo & Cervantes, 2018). Turnover among teachers of color is also of concern in urban schools because it contributes to a leaky educator pipeline (Ingersoll & May, 2011), enacts a revolving door of new and unexperienced teachers (Kini & Podolsky, 2016), and exacerbates conditions of organizational instability that undermine student learning (Bryk et al., 2010). Departure among teachers of color also exacerbates the gender and ethno-racial imbalance of a largely white and female teacher workforce in schools and contributes to disproportionality among students of color in comparison to
their white peers (Kramarzuk Voulgarides et al., 2017; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

In recent decades, there is renewed interest in the lived experiences of teachers of color in schools and factors that shape their decision-making, including those to remain or depart from the classroom (Dixon et al., 2019; Hinkley & McCorkell, 2019; Kokka, 2016; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; White, 2018). However, the significance of intersecting ethno-racial and gender identities and how these are negotiated in the workplace remains under-examined (Woodson & Bristol, 2020). This study contextualizes its investigation of professional experiences and decision-making in tandem with intersectionality and identity negotiation among self-identified Black women teachers of the African diaspora, who are underrepresented in research on urban schools yet hold a vital sociopolitical and historical role in education (Hill-Jackson, 2017, 2020; Shipp, 2000; McCluskey, 2014).

Specifically, I will explore the ways in which self-identified Black women teachers navigate their ethno-racial and gender identities and how these shape their professional experiences and decision-making in urban schools.

Problem Statement: Ethno-Racial Imparity in the Teacher Workforce

Federal and state demographic surveys of schools account for numerical and proportional disparity between teachers of color and students of color. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), children of color comprised 39% of students enrolled in public schools in Fall 2000 while white children composed 61% of students. By 2017, the percentage of children of color in public schools increased to 52% and is projected to rise (NCES, 2020). Regarding ethno-racial categories, the NCES
reports that 24% of students are Hispanic/Latino, 16% identify as Black, 5% are Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% identify as American Indian/Alaska Native, and 3% identify as two or more races. Although the teacher workforce has welcomed proportionally more diverse candidates, only 20% of the national teacher workforce identify as non-white (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2019). Consistent with data reported by the Albert Shanker Institute (2015), the NCES indicates the percentage of Latinos and Asians in the national teacher workforce have substantially increased in recent decades; nevertheless, the number of Pacific Islander and Indigenous teachers remain low, and the Black teacher workforce has declined in recent decades. These shifts signal that while American public schools- and society at large- is rapidly diversifying, there remains significant ethno-racial impparity between the teacher workforce and the students they serve.

A variety of terms are used to describe the ethno-racial impparity of the teacher workforce. Gay and Howard (2000) refer to this problem as the *demographic divide*. Villegas and Irvine (2010) call this the *demographic imperative*, which they suggest:

> first received national attention in the early 1980s, when scholars, educational leaders, and professional organizations began to warn that the widening cultural gulf that existed then between students of color and their teachers was a serious problem with profound social and educational implications. (p. 176)

More recently, researchers have discussed other terms such as *racial mismatch, cultural asynchrony, isomorphism, and cultural asymmetry* (Blake et al., 2016; Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Redding, 2019; Takei & Shouse, 2008). Taken together, researchers and policymakers argue “considerable intervention” is necessary to ensure that teacher demographics parallel the rapid changes in student demographics in American public schools (Villegas & Irvine, 2010, p. 176). In this study, I use the term “ethno-racial
“matching” to describe the proportional (im)balance of ethno-racial representation in comparison to students of color. This term is also used elsewhere in teacher diversity literature (Shirrell et al., 2021; Woodson & Bristol, 2020). Additionally, “ethno-racial” is used to describe socially constructed categories of ethnic origin and racial classification (Jiménez et al., 2018). Drawing from the work of Christian Paredes (2018), ethno-racial status is shaped by three traits—ancestry, external appearance, and self-identification—and used to describe such federal classifications such as “Black/African-American”, Indigenous”, and “Hispanic/Latino”1 to name a few.

The issue of diversity in the teacher workforce lingers despite greater attention to ethno-racial matching in recent decades and its potential to foster equitable and democratic conditions in schools (Redding, 2019; Villegas and Irvine, 2010). In a review of arguments for increasing the ethno-racial diversity of the teacher workforce, Villegas and Irvine (2010) find that higher proportional representation of teachers of color correlates with higher academic outcomes for students, positive educational experiences and socioemotional wellbeing, higher performance on both subjective and standardized assessments of student learning (particularly among Black and Latino students), less instances of disproportional and hyper-punitive discipline, and higher rates of referral among Black and Latino students to gifted and advanced coursework. In another detailed

1 The term, “Hispanic/Latino”, is used as a federal classification for students whose ancestry hails from Spanish-speaking nations. I acknowledge the limitations of this term, its relationship to coloniality, anti-indigeneity, and anti-Blackness. Although it is a pan-ethnic term used commonly in the United States, it fails to acknowledge the ethno-racial, linguistic, and gender diversity of peoples from Latin America. Alternative phrases include “Latine” and “Latinx”, but these are also limited. Therefore, to honor the ways in which the self-identified participant spoke about herself, her students, and her communities as well as be consistent with prior literature and data reporting, the term “Latino” will be used in this dissertation study.
examination of 37 empirical studies regarding the benefits of ethnic-racial diversity in the teacher workforce, Redding (2019) found significant evidence that ethno-racial matching between Black and Latino teachers and Black and Latino students correlate with higher ratings of academic ability and perception of behavior. Teachers of color may also serve as role models (Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010) and disrupt racialized and gendered social stereotypes for students with whom they do not share ethno-racial group membership (Ladson-Billings, 2018). These conclusions point to the value of student exposure to ethno-racial diversity among teaching staff; however, they do not address issues related to teacher turnover, underrepresentation of ethno-racially diverse candidates, nor the steady churn of Black teachers from American public schools.

Of particular concern regarding the Black teacher workforce is Black women, who comprise five percent of the teacher workforce and 78% of all Black teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Studies suggest that many Black women teachers are compelled by the urban factor to work with students with whom they share ethno-racial match and cultural affinity (Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018). Black women teachers are also more likely than non-Black teachers to serve in Title 1 and Title 1-eligible schools in communities (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). As such, high rates of turnover among Black women teachers threaten the stability of the Black teacher workforce, the ethno-racial diversity of the teacher workforce, and the urban staffing pipeline (Hill-Jackson, 2020). These statistical trends also merit a deeper examination of the ways in which intersecting identities- and the negotiation of these identities- factor into how they perceive their work. Through use of Black Feminist and Cultural Contract theories, I hope to broaden the discussion regarding teachers of color in
schools and the ways in which multiple intersections of identities shape their professional experiences and decision-making.

**Historical Origins of Ethno-Racial Imparity in the Teacher Workforce**

Much of the teacher diversity literature in recent decades are nested within larger concerns surrounding urban schools, educational reform, and continued pursuit of civil rights for minoritized children in historically disinvested and marginalized low-income communities. Arguments to recruit and retain teachers of color are supported by federal, and state policy agendas (“Aspiring to Educate”, 2019; “Every Student Succeeds Act Title II, Part A”, 2015; Riley, 1998) and most recently, President Biden’s agenda for education (“The Biden Plan for Educators, Students, and Our Future”, 2020). I argue, however, that researchers, policymakers, and education leaders must situate their commitment to diversify the teacher workforce by acknowledging the ways in which racism, among other intersecting systems of oppression, have shaped the ethno-racially homogeneous teacher workforce today. In this section, I discuss attributes of the historical legacy that Black women have in education, often serving as pioneers and agents of social change despite multiple barriers to Black education, the Black teacher workforce, and the growth of an ethno-racially diverse teacher workforce.

The historical record reveals the rich legacy of Black women in American education with particular attention to the sociopolitical nature of their contributions and civic resistance despite systematic race-based, state-sanctioned exclusion from schooling. This state-sanctioned exclusion originated during the era of chattel slavery in the United States. Throughout the time of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, it was illegal for enslaved
Africans to learn to read; the restriction of education was utilized to maintain a largely illiterate workforce to stifle aspirations and efforts to overthrow their oppressors. Despite the prohibition of literacy, enslaved Africans relayed to each other what they learned and valued education. During this period, Black women were more likely than men to become literate and transmit their skills to their communities despite that doing so was illegal (Anderson, 1988). While public schooling was uncommon in the South until after the Civil War (Mendez et al., 2017), the history record provides some indication that Africans and their descendants formed small schools as early as the 19th century (Anderson, 1988). For example, reports cite that a Black woman teacher by the name of Deveraux ran a school in Savannah, Georgia circa 1833 (Anderson, 1988).

Even after the enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation, many African American communities established and funded schools, which signaled a deep commitment to education and the formation of schools as a pathway to self-determination and economic stability. Although first-hand reports provide conflicting accounts regarding the quality of education (Fairclough, 2004), many agree that these students were often taught by Black teachers, who established relationships with students’ families, were respected by the community, and perceived schooling as critical for social mobility (Anderson, 1988). While there was disproportionate access to schooling, education became a viable career option for many scholars and intellectuals who collectively were characterized as a “caring and dedicated Black teaching corps” (Fultz, 1995, p. 402). Black women educators played a prominent role in these schools and by 1910 “women [comprised] two-thirds of the African American teaching force” (Randolph, 2009, p. 26). Despite facing conditions of exclusion and discrimination, many
prominent Black women teachers such as Fanny Jackson Coppin (1837-1913), Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964), and Nannie Helen Burroughs (1879-1961) emerged to advance civil rights through education in both the North and South (Allen-Handy & Farinde-Wu, 2017).

In the South, Black schools and the rapidly growing Black teacher workforce were heavily resisted by Southern planters and Northern philanthropists, who saw the establishment of Black schools as a threat to the social, economic, and political interests of elite landowning white Americans. As a result, efforts to expand Black-run schools and expand the Black teacher pipeline were stymied through disproportionate funding to Black-run K to 12 schools and teacher training programs, limited access to physical and material resources, and establishment of subjective assessments and mounting requirements to become a teacher. Despite these systematic and racialized inequalities, the Black teacher workforce continued to grow substantially until the Brown v. Board of Education ruling, which led to mass displacement and which many attribute as having significant effects on the largely racially homogenous teacher workforce that exists today (Fairclough, 2004; Madkins, 2011; Oakley et al., 2009).

In 1954, the US Supreme Court overturned state-sanctioned segregation in the Brown v. Board of Education ruling. While Brown v. Board of Education held promise to dismantle inequitable distribution of resources and treatment of Black students, the historical record shows that Black teachers were largely disregarded from integration efforts (Thompson, 2019). Some argue that the NAACP civil rights lawyers anticipated the adverse impact of the Brown decision on the Black teacher workforce but failed to protect their employment status more effectively (Walker, 2009). Many white education
policymakers and community members heavily resisted Black educators teaching white students (Fultz, 2004). Historians figure up to one-third of the Black educator workforce lost their jobs or were demoted despite federal guidelines to transition Black teachers into the newly desegregated schools (Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014; Thompson, 2019). Some Black teachers went to the North to pursue employment but also faced lingering discriminatory practices that continued well into the 21st century (Alvarez, 2003).

The historical record also indicates that many Black teachers in the North also faced structural barriers to teaching as well as discriminatory hiring and assignments to under-resourced schools. Although many Northern states restricted de jure school segregation, neighborhoods were characterized by de facto segregation, which led to racially isolated schools (DuBois, 1899; Frankenberg, 2013). Some accounts also mention that even when some Black teachers were integrated into white schools, they largely faced racialized resistance from white colleagues, students, families, and community members (Fairclough, 2004).

The historical record indicates similar discriminatory conditions existed in Northern schools that shaped inequitable representation of Black teachers. While school segregation mandates were lifted in many Northern states at the turn of the 20th century, housing policies such as redlining maintained residential segregation, which in turn resulted in double segregation- schools with high rates of students of color from under-resourced and disinvested communities. While tactics such as busing existed to diversify Northern schools, instances of discriminatory teacher assignment practices kept Black teachers in schools with high numbers of Black students. Even when faced with pressure to develop teacher integration plans by Black civic associations and political entities,
these policies were often resisted to the point of legal action by school officials and often abetted by teacher unions and White community members (Alvarez, 2013). Policies were put in place that prevented Black teachers to become principals and if promoted, Black principals were often placed in low-performing schools in disinvested neighborhoods (Spencer, 2012). These historical events fueled by anti-Black racism laid the foundation for the ethno-racial imparity evidence in the teacher workforce today.

Though the effect of the Brown decision on Black women educators is understudied, consistent themes surface regarding their lived experiences in the decades that followed. I use the term “Black women educators” and not Black women teachers because the following characteristics are used to describe Black women in both teaching and educational leadership roles (Ards, 2015; Loder-Jackson, 2012). Black women educators demonstrated strong commitment to student learning and culturally sensitive methods to address students' cultural backgrounds (Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014). Black women educators were engaged in othermothering, displays of community-oriented care, educational support, and socioemotional nurturing (Case, 1997; Peters, 2019). Finally, Black women educators maintained a social justice orientation to improving academic and socioemotional outcomes for Black children through academically rigorous instruction (Alston & Jones, 2002). These historical themes are consistent with contemporary studies regarding attributes of some Black women teachers, including commitment to classroom activism (Pierre, 2010), political ideology and pedagogy (Dixson, 2003; Watson, 2017), and race and gender-conscious informed approaches to teaching (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002).
Significance of the Study

This research offers significant implications for research, policy, and practice. First, this study adds to the literature base through an exploration of intersectionality and identity negotiation as factors influencing the professional experiences and decision-making of teachers of color. While this present study contextualizes intersectionality and identity negotiation through the lens of Black women, it can provide a model for similar studies for teachers of other racially minoritized groups.

Second, this research centers the relationship between ethno-racial and gender identities, professional experiences, and factors that shape the decisions of Black women teachers to remain in - or leave- urban schools. By drawing attention to the relationship of working conditions and teacher turnover, this research can inform educational policy and school leader practice to create and implement policies that address teacher identities, foster culturally affirming workplaces, and disrupt the trend of high turnover among teachers of color. In my own training and tenure as a school leader in a relatively high-performing Charter Management Organization in an urban setting, school-level policy and management practices were blind to issues of ethno-racial and gender justice. Although these were at times discussed in relation to monitoring student outcomes and potential instances of inequality, conversations regarding the political and social implications of educator identities were often muted, thus enabling gendered and racialized treatment of educators. In my opinion, this treatment negatively shaped teacher motivation, eroded morale, and contributed to the disproportional voluntary departure of many educators of color from the school, including myself. While this present study does
not intend to homogenize the perceptions nor lived experiences of Black women teachers nor teachers of color as a whole, I believe the procurement of stories, attention to the presence of teachers’ multiple social identities, and gleaning wisdom from the standpoint of Black women can shape how educational decision-makers and school leaders enact policy, inform their interactions with staff, and the strategies implemented to attract and retain an ethno-racially diverse teacher workforce. Additionally, I hope these topics encourage educational policymakers and school leaders to consider the ways in which other intersections of identity (such as sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, educational level, dis/ability, etc.) also shape the professional experiences and decision-making of teachers of color.

**Purpose Statement**

The aim of this narrative study is to explore how ethno-racial and gender identity factors into professional experiences and decision-making for self-identified Black women teachers of the African diaspora in urban schools. This work builds on previous studies by exploring the role of identity negotiation as a factor contributing to professional experiences and decision-making. At this stage of the research, identity is defined as a complex social construct, consisting of both durable and non-durable factors that are transacted, co-constructed, and managed during interpersonal interactions and encounters (Jackson, 2002). The primary constructs of interest are ethno-racial identity and gender, which are culturally manufactured and have historical and sociopolitical implications in terms of property rights, representation, and voice (Dixson & Rousseau, 2018; Harris, 1993). This study is primarily concerned with Black ethno-racial identity, which refers to peoples of the African diaspora, including African Americans, African
peoples, *Afro-Latinos*, and Afro-Caribbeans (Lisle-Johnson & Kohli, 2020). Moreover, this research centers the experiences of self-identified Black women teachers. To this end, I agree with Black feminist writers who attest that the socially imposed intersection of ethno-racial and gender identities uniquely shapes the collective experiences, consciousness, and relationship to power that is unshared by Black men and white women (Collins, 1989). This study also explores identity negotiation, which is defined as a “conscious and mindful process of shifting one’s worldview or cultural behaviors” away from one's indigenous cultural patterns to align with the dominant culture (Jackson, 2002, p. 49). This study examines these constructs within the context of public charter schools and traditional public schools in urban communities in metropolitan settings characterized by a high density of minoritized student populations (Milner, 2012). The choice research setting is influenced by research that suggests that Black women teachers are disproportionally over-represented in urban settings yet experience disproportionate rates of turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2012; White, 2020).

**Research Questions**

This qualitative study will investigate the interplay of teacher intersectional identities in schools and identity negotiation as factors influencing professional experiences and decision-making. Specifically, the following questions guide this research:

1. *How do self-identified Black women teachers explain ethno-racial and gender identities as factors influencing their pedagogical decisions?*
2. How do the ethno-racial and gender identities of self-identified Black women influence workplace interactions and relationships with colleagues and school leaders?

3. How do ethno-racial and gender identities influence how Black women teachers negotiate their identities to adapt to working conditions in urban schools?

Through use of these research questions, this narrative inquiry adds to the literature in terms of how policymakers and practitioners conceptualize teacher diversity and particularly the ways in which intersectionality complicates factors influencing how teachers of color navigate workplace ecologies. This research draws on two theories-Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1989; 1990) and Cultural Contract Theory (Jackson, 2002; 2004). Whereas the former theoretical framework has been previously implemented to understand intersectionality in schools (Dixson, 2003; Dixson & Dingus, 2007; Dunmeyer, 2020; Farinde et al., 2016; McCray et al., 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Parson & Mensah, 2010; Stanley, 2020), Cultural Contract Theory is an innovative approach to explore how Black women shift identities in response to the work environment (Harris, 2007). Additionally, Dickens et al. (2019) names Cultural Contract Theory as an opportunity to examine identity negotiation exhibited by Black women as they navigate their professional environments. I suggest that these two theories will add to the conversation about how intersectional ethno-racial and gender identities influence how teachers of color make sense of their identities and navigate their schools.
Overview of the Structure

This dissertation proposal is composed of five chapters. Chapter two is the literature review. This chapter explores the landscape of contemporary turnover among teachers of color and Black women teachers. Chapter two also examines relevant studies exploring the phenomenon of turnover among teachers of color, professional experiences regarding school working conditions and workplace ecology, and how these factor into their decision-making. Chapter three provides a detailed overview of the methodology that informs the data collection and analysis of this study. Chapter four presents the results, including ten themes that answer the research questions with supporting evidence from participant narratives. The final chapter, chapter five, discusses implications for research, practice, and policy.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This study rests upon the assumption that consideration of overlapping identities and intersecting systems of oppression are of critical importance to understand and remedy underrepresentation of ethno-racially diverse teachers in the American teacher workforce. Guided by Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1989, 1990) and Cultural Contract Theory (Jackson, 2002, 2004), I argue that intersectionality and negotiation of multiple, overlapping identities complicate our understanding of factors that influence the professional experiences and decision-making of teachers of color. Additionally, I argue that to effectively foster inclusive and affirming working conditions that support and retain teachers of color, those invested in issues surrounding teacher diversity must attend to how elements of workplace ecology also factor into the professional experiences and decision-making of teachers of color. In the first section of this literature review, I provide an overview of seminal quantitative studies illustrating turnover among teachers of color as a factor undermining the growth of an ethno-racially diverse teacher workforce. Then, I survey qualitative studies related to how teachers of color perceive elements of school working conditions and how issues of identity shape their professional experiences and decision-making. Following this, I present the Black Feminist Thought and Cultural Contract Theory as theoretical frameworks that lend themselves to understanding intersectionality and identity negotiation as factors influencing the professional experiences and decision-making of Black women teachers. I conclude this literature review by discussing how this study extends current literature through a
contextual analysis of intersectionality and identity negotiation among self-identified Black women teachers of the African diaspora in urban schools.

Establishing the Case: Factors Influencing Ethno-Racial Diversity in the Workforce

Two arguments attempt to explain pervasive ethno-racial mismatch between the teacher workforce and the rapidly diversifying student population. Some argue ethno-racial mismatch is linked to a supply problem in the pre-service teacher pipeline (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Fiddiman et al., 2018; Petchauer et al., 2018; Riley, 1998; Sutcher et al., 2016). Other studies indicate ethno-racial mismatch in the teacher workforce reflects larger concerns regarding teacher turnover, particularly among early career teachers and urban teacher turnover, is characterized by higher rates of teacher departure than suburban schools (Achinstein et al. 2010; Buchanan et al., 2013; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Simon & Johnson, 2015). This later body of research argues that turnover- not supply- impedes the growth of an ethno-racially diverse teacher workforce. In this section, I evaluate these arguments through use of two metaphors: the leaky pipeline and the revolving door.

The Leaky Pipeline and the Revolving Door

Proponents of the leaky pipeline link lack of teacher diversity to a supply problem, including the following factors:

- Disproportionate high school graduation rates among students of color in comparison to their white peers (Ahmad & Boser, 2014; NCES Common Core of Data, n.d.)
• Comparatively lower college enrollment and persistence (NCES Common Core of Data, n.d.; Stohr et al., 2018)

• Poor experiences in K-12 education, including implicit bias, low expectations, or racism, which discourage potential candidates from the possibility of teaching (Keane et al., 2018)

• Wide range of attractive and prestigious employment opportunities other than teaching (Hill-Jackson, 2017)

• Disproportional debt burden facing students of color, which disincentivizes potential candidates from entering teaching, a presumably low-paying career (Carver-Thomas, 2017, 2018; Fiddiman et al., 2019)

• Lack of diverse representation in the teacher workforce and role models limits the potential that students of color see teaching as a career possibility for them (Jacinto & Gershenson, 2021)

To address the leaky pipeline, advocates propose a wide range of solutions, including future educator programs, diversity recruitment initiatives, and Grow Your Own programs to name a few (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Stohr et al., 2018).

Regarding the revolving door, Ingersoll and May (2011) reveal that turnover— not supply—are to blame for the ethno-racial mismatch between teachers and students. Increasing the ethno-racial diversity of the teacher workforce has incrementally gained national popularity since the late 1980’s, when the DeWitt Wallace Reader’s Digest Fund first invested $60 million into initiatives to recruit candidates of color to teaching. By 2008, more than 36 states report implementation of recruitment programs to diversify their workforce (Villegas & Davis, 2008). Guided by data from the Schools and Staffing
Survey (SASS) and Teacher Follow Up Surveys (TFS), Ingersoll and May reveal that numbers of ethno-racially diverse teachers doubled from 325,000 in 1988 to 642,000 in 2008. During this time, the total number of teachers also increased nationwide to meet the demand for the growing student population. Despite this, teachers of color outpaced the growth of the white teacher workforce (96% respectively to 41%). By 2003-2004, 50% of the BIPOC teacher workforce work in urban settings, 53% work in Title 1 schools, and 63% work in schools with majority students of color. These findings suggest that initiatives to diversify the teacher workforce were largely successful, especially in urban, low-income schools characterized by high enrollment of minoritized students. It may be the case that recruitment initiatives focused on hiring teachers of color for these contexts, which are often harder to staff than non-urban, non-Title 1 schools (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). However, it may also be the case that teachers of color are drawn by factors such as role modeling (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012; Ochoa, 2007; Vilson, 2015) and desire to influence educational experiences and outcomes of students of color (Banerjee, 2019; Ford, 2021; Glock and Suchart, 2020).

The data regarding the apparent growth of the teacher workforce- particularly in urban schools- must be interpreted with caution. SASS and TFS survey data indicate that despite the doubling of the teacher workforce, turnover among teachers of color outpaced the rate of teachers of color entering the profession (Ingersoll & Connor, 2009; Ingersoll & May, 2011). For example, 47,663 BIPOC teachers entered the workforce in 2003-2004 but 56,244 left that same year (Ingersoll & May, 2011). The following year, more than 56,000 BIPOC teachers left the workforce (Ingersoll & May, 2011), among these included 16,000 who indicated that they were retiring and 30,000 who attributed turnover
to job dissatisfaction. While Ingersoll and May argue that not all teacher turnover is bad (for instance teacher departure may involve moving to a different education-related role or removal of ineffective teachers from schools), *the revolving door* continues to threaten the growth of an ethno-racially teacher workforce. In the same vein, recent surveys conducted by the National Association of Education (2022) indicate that unprecedented strain from the Covid-19 pandemic on under-resourced schools exacerbated issues of turnover among teachers of color with 62% of Black and 59% Latino teachers indicating desire to leave teaching sooner than planned.

Taken together, *the leaky pipeline* and *the revolving door* provide a comprehensive understanding of factors undergirding under-representation of teachers of color in the American K-12 teacher workforce. Consistent with the works of Stohr et al., (2018) and Gold (2020), I take the position that teacher turnover exacerbates pre-existing strains on the leaky teacher pipeline. As such, I argue examination of the professional experiences and decision-making of teachers of color must be situated within the larger context of why teachers of color leave the profession at disproportionate rates. In other words, deconstructing turnover among teachers of color is prerequisite to understanding aspects of workplace ecology that shape their professional experiences and decision-making.

Factors Explaining Teacher Turnover

An extensive body of literature links teacher turnover to the different types of choices teachers make to leave their classrooms. Teachers who experience turnover may be described as:
- "Movers" or individuals who switch schools (Ingersoll, 2001; Leukens et al., 2004; Marvel et al., 2007; White, 2018),
- "Leavers" or people who move from teaching to another career (Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson et al., 2005),
- "Shifters", people who leave the classroom but stay in education (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003; Hunter Quartz et al., 2008)
- "Returners" or those who leave teaching temporarily and return (Penlington, 2002).

Prior studies broadly suggest teacher turnover across ethno-racial and gender groups is predicted by variables such as teacher education background, means of entry into teaching, years of experiences, and level of educational attainment (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Redding & Henry, 2019). Broadly speaking, school context and student body demographics also factor into teacher perception of school workplace ecology and employment decisions. For example, several studies indicate teachers are more likely to leave schools with high percentages of students of color in low-income communities than schools with predominantly white students (Curran et al., 2019; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Gieger & Pivovarova, 2018; see also Achinstein et al., 2009). For instance, one early quantitative investigation of teacher turnover in the School District of Philadelphia, Watson (2001) found that over the course of four years, teachers tended to move from lower-achieving schools with high populations of Black and Latino students to higher-achieving schools with lower populations of Black and Latino students. In contrast, Loeb and Estrada (2005) suggests that teacher ratings of schools are a greater predictor of teacher employment decisions and turnover than student ethno-racial and
socioeconomic demographics. Similarly, Kuriloff et al., (2019) employ mixed methods research with twenty Philadelphia School District teachers to indicate that school context shaped teacher perception of their abilities and subsequent employment decisions. For example, some teachers attributed lack of professional development opportunities at their school or assignment to teach classes outside of their content area expertise contributed to their decision-making to move from one school to the next. However, these studies are limited in their analysis of how the social construction of identity, overlapping identities, and even identity negotiation may factor into reasons undergirding turnover. Additionally, these studies do not explain reasons for turnover by ethno-racial group nor gender. For that reason, other studies are needed to explore the phenomenon of the revolving door. Simply put, a contextual analysis on teachers of color is required to understand factors leading to disproportionate turnover.

Turnover among Teachers of Color and School Working Conditions

In a series of seminal studies and working papers, Ingersoll, May, and Collins (2019) use descriptive statistics and multiple logistic regression of TFS and SASS data to explore reasons undergirding turnover among teachers of color. Their work concludes that turnover among teachers of color and white teachers are linked to different reasons. Whereas many teachers of color report a commitment to teaching racially minoritized students or in schools that mirror their own cultural communities (Achinstein et al., 2010), the data conveys that school poverty level, setting, and student demographics do not factor significantly into how teachers of color rank school or make employment decisions. While these variables predict turnover among teachers more broadly, they fail
to explain disproportionate turnover among teachers of color. Confirming earlier findings by Ingersoll and May (2011), Ingersoll et al. (2019) found *job dissatisfaction* (50%) as the highest-ranking reason for turnover among teachers of color. This is followed by *family or personal reasons* (46%), *pursuing another job* (30%), *school or staffing action* (25%), or *retirement* (17%). Teachers of color conveyed job dissatisfaction as *very important* or *extremely important* in their decisions to change schools or leave the profession altogether, describing specific elements of school working conditions such as dissatisfaction with leadership, emphasis on standardized testing, and lack of classroom autonomy as the primary factors for departure. These findings in this study are consistent with a report released by the Albert Shanker Institute (2015), which suggest that job dissatisfaction and desire for better working conditions are among the leading reasons for turnover among teachers of color. Although helpful to understand the link between working conditions and turnover, the use of close-ended survey questions do not provide insight to the kinds of job dissatisfaction experienced by teachers nor the kinds of family or personal reasons that drew them away from their schools.

Of particular concern regarding teacher turnover are Black teachers. National teacher demographic data (NCES, 2020) convey a steady decline in Black teachers from 1988 to 2008 despite growth of non-Black teachers of color. In the next section, I evaluate relevant quantitative studies that explore turnover trends among Black teachers and more specifically, Black women teachers, who comprise most of the Black teacher workforce. Although the studies discussed in the next section are quantitative, they provide deeper insight into elements of job dissatisfaction that explain turnover among Black women teachers.
Quantitative Analysis of Turnover Among Black Women

It is only since the work of Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) that a systematic quantitative analyses of turnover among Black women teachers has become available within the broader context of turnover among Black teachers. In this section, I will describe this study as well as a follow-up quantitative analysis by Farinde-Wu and Fitchett (2018) that provide necessary context to understand elements of working conditions that influence turnover among Black women teachers. I suggest that understanding factors linking working conditions to turnover among Black women teachers provides a necessary context to consider variables that shape their professional experiences and decision-making prior to leaving teaching.

Comparison of the findings with those of other studies confirms higher rates of turnover among Black teachers in comparison to other ethno-racial groups. They state, “At 21.1%, the Black teacher turnover rate is nearly 60% greater than the non-Black teacher turnover rate (13.4%)” (p. 170). Of particular concern is "the [national] turnover rate for black women, 21.8%, is significantly greater than that of non-Black women (13.4%, p. 0.01)” and greater than that of Black men (18.54%, p. 0.1)” (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. 170). Guided by TFS and SASS data, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond explore regional turnover trends among Black women. For example, Black women represent a higher proportion of overall teacher employment in the Northeast and Southern region of the United States; yet Black women are also leaving these regions at high rates. In 2007-2008, Black women comprised 9% of the overall Southern teacher workforce yet experienced a turnover rate of 26% in that same year. By comparison, the overall rate of teacher turnover in the South was 16%. When surveyed,
TFS and SASS respondents who identified as Black women explained three factors linked to working conditions—dissatisfaction with administrative support, salary, access to resources—as very and extremely important factors into their decision-making to change schools or leave the profession altogether. By comparison, Black men and non-Black teachers were far less likely to attribute turnover decisions to school location, family, or personal reasons.

In a comparative study, Farinde-Wu and Fitchett (2018) implemented a hierarchical multiple regression analysis to explore elements of school working conditions predicting turnover among Black women teachers. Using an unweighted sample of 970 self-identified Black women from TFS survey data from 2007 to 2008, Farinde-Wu and Fitchett determined no statistical relationship linking teacher demographics (e.g., age, grade band, certification type and route, educational level, and years teaching), workplace satisfaction, and turnover. In a second model including school type (traditional public vs. charter), urbanity (urban versus suburban) and percentage of students of color, data indicates a 12% variance in teacher job satisfaction and retention. The authors conclude that Black women teachers reported higher levels of satisfaction working in urban, non-charter schools serving predominantly students of color. This is consistent with prior findings by Ni (2012) regarding increased workload often experienced by teachers in the charter sector as well as high instructional demands. The third model yielded the most significant findings. These results establish a relationship between turnover and satisfaction with instructional support, administration, and salary. Together, these findings by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) and Farinde-Wu and Fitchett (2018) provide necessary context to how elements of school working
conditions influence turnover among Black women. In this next section, I will evaluate these seminal quantitative findings and explain how they provide necessary context for understanding the professional experiences and decision-making among Black women teachers prior to making decisions to leave urban schools.

*Instructional Support*

Seminal findings by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) link instructional support to workplace satisfaction among Black women teachers and turnover. They found that self-identified Black women teachers were 3.5 times likely to enter the classroom through alternative certification pathways that did not employ student teaching. Thus, Black women teachers are more likely to enter teaching without the same pre-service support provided by university teacher preparation programs. While they report the same levels of mentoring and induction experiences consistent with early career teachers, they perceive these supports are not effective. Additionally, Black women report being assigned a mentor at higher rates than other first year teachers. However, they report less frequent meetings and are less likely than other teachers to find these supports to be effective. Moreover, while very few teachers had wraparound support, including reduced teaching load, co-planning, mentoring, additional assistance with instructional tasks and feedback, Black women teachers were one-tenth less likely than their peers to enjoy these supports. This data reveals misalignment between their perceived needs and support received. Although insightful, this data fails to explain why Black women teachers perceive instructional support to be ineffective. One may interpret these findings to consider strained human and material resources in urban schools where
Black women teachers are over-represented. Related studies exploring perceptions of instructional support among early career teachers of color indicate different induction supports may be required such as assistance with culturally informed teaching methods (Achinsein et al., 2012; Achinsein & Ogawa, 2010) and navigating sociocultural challenges (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008). However, it cannot be assumed these explain dissatisfaction with instructional support among self-identified Black women teachers. As such, there is a need to center Black women’s standpoint as well as use qualitative methods to explore how working conditions factor into Black women teachers’ experiences with instructional support.

**Administrative Support**

Results by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) are consistent with those of Farinde-Wu and Fitchett (2018) regarding perception of administration as a factor contributing to teacher dissatisfaction and turnover. Farinde-Wu and Fitchett (2018) determine that perception of administrative support (0.85, p < .001) was ranked higher in terms of influencing teacher satisfaction and retention when compared to other factors such as commitment to school (0.65, p < .001), perception of school behavior (0.16, p < .001), and collegiality (.22). These findings are consistent with school leadership literature that suggests that perception of effective leadership is linked to leadership behaviors, including fostering positive, safe, and collegial conditions for teaching and learning (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Shen et al., 2012; Weasmer & Woods, 2002). Although significant, these findings are unable to explain the ways in which ethno-racial dynamics and overlap with other social identities influence interactions and
relationships between Black women teachers and school leaders as well as overall influence on their professional experiences and decision-making.

*Salary*

While data does not indicate statistical difference by race and gender in relation to teacher salary, Black women report higher levels of dissatisfaction related to pay than other groups of teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). In their exploration of survey data, over 65% of Black women expressed being dissatisfied with their pay in comparison to just 50% of teachers, Black men, and women who report nearly identical beginning salaries. According to the researchers, these initial findings do not account for cost-of-living differences across the United States and geographic regions in which Black women teachers are over-represented. For example, cost-of-living differs based on geography and urbanity in the United States, creating alarming disparities between regions like the Northeast, the Midwest, and the South (Falcettoni & Nygaard, 2020). Additionally, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond suggest that Black women teachers may perceive pay insufficient for long hours often required by working in high-needs schools. However, the data fails to substantiate these hypotheses. While dissatisfaction with salary may influence turnover, it is unclear the extent to which this influences how Black women perceive their career choice and decision-making as classroom teachers (e.g., decision-making to take on additional paid work outside of teaching). I suggest that qualitative methods may provide clearer explanation as to how salary influences the professional experiences and decision-making of self-identified Black women teachers if at all.
Findings from these seminal studies suggest that elements of school working conditions factor into turnover decisions among Black women teachers. However, a closer analysis of these studies reveals inconsistent disaggregation of the data by ethno-racial identity and gender. Namely, findings by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond are unclear at times in terms of factors influencing turnover among Black teachers more broadly and how these differ from those influencing Black women teachers. While Farinde-Wu and Fitchett disaggregate the data by drawing on a sample of self-identified Black women, the nature of analysis is still constrained by use of only one year’s worth of data. Another limitation of these seminal studies is that the nature of multiple-choice questions constrains opportunities to explore the nuances of how Black women teachers experience the workplace and variables shaping their decision-making. Also, survey findings do not attend to heterogeneity among Black women in consideration to variations in social location. Additionally, the NCES no longer implements SASS and TFS surveys, having replaced these nationally representative data sets with the National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) since 2015-2016. While both seminal studies provide necessary context for how Black women perceive elements of school workplace ecology, a qualitative approach is needed to explore how self-identified Black women teachers characterize their professional experiences and discuss factors that shape their decision-making prior to leaving their school. In this next section, I provide an overview of relevant studies employing qualitative design to examine how self-identified Black women teachers explain factors undergirding their professional experiences and decision-making in urban schools.
Working Conditions, Professional Experiences, and Decision-Making

As established earlier in this chapter, several quantitative studies have established that teachers of color experience disproportionate turnover in comparison to white teachers. Regarding turnover, Black teachers—and Black women in particular—experience higher rates of turnover in relation to other ethno-racial groups. These studies conclusively link turnover among Black women teachers to satisfaction with three elements of working conditions: instructional support, administrative support, and salary. There are three key limitations of the quantitative approach. First, it is limited to explore the ways in which these three factors shape the professional experiences and decision-making of self-identified Black women teachers prior to turnover. Second, close-ended survey questions do not allow participants to provide unique responses, thus failing to identify additional factors that influence how Black women experience schools and turnover decisions. Third, collection of quantitative data is limited in its ability to explore how presence of multiple overlapping social identities adds additional nuance to how Black women negotiate their identities in the workplace. In this next section, I will provide an overview of relevant literature that explains how aspects of working conditions uniquely influence how self-identified Black women experience and make decisions in urban schools. To develop a systematic definition, I draw on White's (2018) use of the term “working conditions” as having three aspects: structural, organizational, and sociocultural conditions. I also use these three aspects of working conditions to organize teacher diversity scholarship regarding factors influencing Black women teachers.
Structural Conditions

Researchers characterize school structural conditions to be influenced by enrollment size, school type and founder, stability of student body, funding, involvement of external stakeholders such as private donors, parent involvement, geographic setting, hiring and staffing model, and unionization (Bryk et al., 2002; Newman & Wehlage, 1995; Tondeur et al., 2009; White, 2018). Structural conditions also set the context for "policies, infrastructures, and schoolwide practices" (Kohli, 2018, p. 314) determined by educational policymakers, school founders, and principals. Structural conditions are the foundation upon which subsequent aspects of school working conditions are laid. In this section, I discuss qualitative research regarding structural conditions- specifically, diversity initiatives, implementation of marketized principles, and opportunities for growth and advancement- as factors influencing the professional experiences and decision-making of Black women teachers.

Diversity Initiatives

Diversity initiatives emerged in the literature as a structural aspect of school working conditions that influence teachers of color as well as Black women teachers in urban schools. Prior research suggests that elements of school structural conditions may assert progressive values yet reinforce the racial status quo. Derrick Bell (1980) asserts that civil rights progress for marginalized racial groups is often concurrent with the advancement of white self-interest (or "interest convergence"). Milner (2008) frames interest-convergence as how power is negotiated to serve systemic interests. As such, interest convergence suggests that people in power permit change provided their rights
and dominance in the social hierarchy remain unhindered. This view is supported by prior studies exploring diversity initiatives intended to attract and retain teachers of color (e.g., teacher recruitment, hiring practices, mentoring programs) often fail to challenge structural inequality. One study by Burns Thomas (2020) described how diversity initiatives to recruit and hire teachers of color undermined efforts to diversify the teacher workforce and reinforced the racial status quo. Employing phenomenological design, Burns Thomas explored how standardization of hiring practices (e.g., a written diversity statement, interview questions, and use of external observers) inadvertently favored white candidates despite its expressed intention to attract more teachers of color. Whereas school leaders formerly used word of mouth, hired paraprofessionals, and recruited from local Grow Your Own (GYO) programs, these policies were banned with the intention of providing equal opportunity for all diverse candidates. Although these efforts were aimed to diversify the teacher candidacy pool, these measures did little to mitigate discriminatory hiring practices. Additionally, Burns Thomas found white principals largely resisted this diversity initiative, verbally supporting the goal of teacher diversity yet expressed concern that pursuit of this goal may contradict hiring the most qualified candidates. Taken together, implementation of these race-neutral policies did little to address selection bias and maintained racialized disparities in hiring. Explicating these conditions through the lens of interest convergence, Burns Thomas provides a concrete example of how structural conditions can uniquely impact how teachers of color enter and experience an urban school.

Elsewhere, Burns Thomas suggests that diversity initiatives may contradict their expressed intentions by hiring staff members who do not share diversity goals nor
“teaching as connected to their racial identity, which undermines the ultimate purpose of increased teacher diversity” (p. 217). For example, Burns Thomas includes two narrative excerpts from two Black teachers about how they perceive themselves in relation to students. One self-identified Black woman teacher said:

> It’s funny because I sometimes think I have my own identity issues. I don’t necessarily see myself as … I mean people look at me and say, oh you’re a black woman but I don’t necessarily see myself … I don’t know how I see myself. (p. 225)

The second narrative told by a self-identified Afro-Latina reveals a very different perspective:

> …It clearly was the reason why I went ahead and got my certification because I realized there was a void and it’s important. And the things I was able to do in middle school and high school. We started the students of color club. Just being a person of color to hear what the concerns were, because kids don’t often want to go to another staff and it wasn’t so much for me to be like, “Oh, well, this is what’s going on.” It was just for them to have a voice. (p. 225)

Although the second teacher perceived that her own ethno-racial identity factored into her commitment to teaching and interactions with students, the first teacher conveyed her “identity issues”, altogether portraying an unclear depiction as to whether she perceives the interplay of her ethno-racial and gender identities as asset to her work as a teacher or as factors contributing to how she approaches her work. As such, Burns Thomas supplies contradictory evidence about the interaction between diversity initiatives and the ways in which they may bring about outcomes that conflict with their expressed intention. These narrative excerpts are also interesting as the first teacher’s comments merit additional investigation about how Black women teachers may construct different meanings regarding their ethno-racial and gender identities, how they negotiate them in the
workplace, and the extent to which (if at all) these factor into their professional experiences and decision-making.

**Marketized Principles**

A growing body of research suggests that implementation of marketized principles in urban schools—rather than school type—may also influence the professional experiences and decision-making of teachers of color (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012; Collins, 1989; Lipman, 2011; Sleeter, 2017; White, 2018). The term "marketized principles" used here describes neoliberal strategies such as high-stakes testing, performance-based evaluations, and standardized curriculum often used to reform urban schools.

In an ethnographic study of Black women teachers in New York City charter schools, White (2020) revealed elements of marketized principles such as rigid performance-based evaluations and emphasis on high stakes testing implicitly shaped their classroom autonomy and pedagogical decisions about content and teaching techniques. Also, participants indicated that emphasis on competition and accountability for student outcomes shaped the nature of their interactions with school leaders. Using a Critical Race Policy framework, White analyzes how marketized principles influence dynamics between Black women participants and their leaders. She says:

> power struggles [that] were gendered and racialized, as managers of new schools (and their philanthropic partners) are often white and male, come from elite backgrounds outside of education, and oftentimes favor paternalistic approaches to the education of poor children. (p. 364)

White reports performance-based evaluations taken together with dissatisfaction with leadership negatively influenced the professional experiences of her participants and within the course of her study, one-third of teachers who left the classroom. White
suggests that expanding teacher unions in charter schools, restricting charter expansion, and informing teachers of color regarding distinctions between public charter schools and traditional public schools may mitigate the phenomenon of marketized principles on Black women teachers. However, works by Fryer (2014) indicate that even non-charter schools may adopt similar marketized practices. Elsewhere, Stanley (2020) alludes to marketized principles as an aspect of school structural conditions in urban schools. However, his findings do not reflect this topic. As such, I endeavor in this study to sample participants from both traditional public and charter schools to examine the ways in which presence of marketization influences aspects of the professional experiences and decision-making of self-identified Black women teachers.

**Opportunities for Growth and Advancement**

Prior research indicates turnover among Black women may be linked to dissatisfaction with opportunities for advancement and professional growth. In one study exploring professional experiences of Black women teachers and decision-making to leave or stay in their schools, Farinde et al. (2017) found the desire for professional growth and advancement to be common among participants regardless of years of experience. Participants often described that their professional needs were unmet; however, the possibility of future opportunities for growth and advancement factor into their decision-making to stay in their schools or switch to another school where this possibility could be realized. Drawing upon Black Feminist Thought, Farinde conveys participants’ pursuit of professional development as an aspect of their self-valuation and agency to define themselves as classroom and educational leaders. Although they often
encountered a “glass-ceiling”, which caused opportunities for professional advancement to be infrequent, the opportunity to advance their career and increase their salary became a significant factor into their intentions to remain in teaching.

Farinde et al. (2017) also describe salary as a factor influencing Black women’s professional experiences and decision-making. These findings are consistent with results in Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond’s (2017) quantitative exploration regarding salary as a factor shaping decision-making and turnover among Black women teachers. While all participants described dissatisfaction with their pay, opportunities for salary increases influenced their decision-making to remain. There are two caveats in terms of how dissatisfaction with pay factored into participants’ professional experiences and decision-making. First, study participants were in the South where teaching salaries on average are lower than other parts of the country (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Additionally, single mothers (n = 3) explained dissatisfaction with pay with higher frequency than non-single mothers. Despite satisfaction with most elements of working conditions, low pay taken together with need for financial stability, childcare expenses, and pressures of a single income were structural barriers to remain in teaching. Although parenting and child welfare is not altogether gendered responsibility nor unique to only Black women, the consequences of single motherhood may be shaped by conflicting intersections of racial, gender, and class oppression (Collins, 2005). However, these women, like other participants in the study, connected their decision-making to stay in teaching to future pay increases. Collectively, these studies add to the literature regarding aspects of structural conditions that influence the professional experiences and employment decisions of self-identified Black women. While these findings from
phenomenological and ethnographic studies raise salient points, it is unclear the extent to which these factors are influenced by ethno-racial and gender identities of self-identified Black women or characteristics of urban schools that impact urban teachers in general. For that reason, I propose narrative methods as a tool to explore how self-identified Black women make meaning of their ethno-racial and gender identities, the manner in which overlapping identities influences how self-identified Black women perceive their work in urban schools, and their decision-making to negotiate these identities in response to elements of school working conditions.

Organizational Conditions

Predicted upon the foundation of school structural conditions, organizational conditions are influenced by professional expectations and accountability structures established by school leadership (White, 2018). This includes the level of leadership oversight, teacher autonomy in the classroom, and level of input on school policy and decision-making (Ingersoll & May, 2011; White, 2018). Organizational conditions also undergird the social context of schools, including interactions and relationships with school leadership and colleagues (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

Interactions and Relationships with School Leadership

School leadership is central to the discussion of school organizational conditions across school type and sector (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999, 2000; Sebastian et al., 2019). Research indicates that school leaders shape organizational conditions for teachers in terms of how they manage school culture and climate,
instructional resources, and provide support (Anderson et al., 2010; Young & King, 2002).

In a series of seminal studies, Blase and Blase (1999, 2000, 2002) suggest teacher perception of leadership support factors into teacher motivation, sense of connectedness, and retention. Specifically, Blase and Blase argue leaders who promote teacher autonomy and agency, foster a non-threatening climate, and demonstrate care for their teachers factors positively into their commitment to teaching and decision to continue working in the school. In one instance, Blase and Blase (2003) use phenomenological design to illustrate that mistreatment- including racism- erodes relationships between teachers and leaders, creates stress, and factors into teacher turnover. This view is supported by quantitative results linking turnover among Black women to teacher dissatisfaction with school leaders (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Farinde & Fitchett, 2018). However, these studies are limited as they fail to address the ways in which presence of multiple overlapping identities influence interactions and relationships between teachers and leaders. Specifically, findings by Blase and Blase fail to acknowledge how intersections of oppressive systems (e.g., racism and sexism) may influence interactions between teachers of color and school leaders. Other bodies of research indicate that teachers of color may experience higher levels of satisfaction and retention in schools with leaders of color (Grissom et al., 2021; Haynes, 2015). However, these findings by Blase and Blase are unclear as to whether or not interactions and relationships with school leaders are influenced by ethno-racial or gender identities if at all. As such, these preliminary findings merit additional investigation to explore how ethno-racial and
gender identities within and across the lines of difference influence how self-identified Black women experience urban schools

*Gendered Racialization: Tokenism, Micro-Aggressions, and Color-Blindness*

Other bodies of research deeply explore elements of racialized and gendered treatment of teachers of color as well as Black women teachers by school leaders and colleagues. In this section, relevant studies regarding tokenism, micro-aggressions, and color-blindness are discussed.

A growing body of research identifies the ways in which racial and gendered tokenism in the workplace shapes the professional experiences of teachers of color and factors into decision-making. Tokenism is a social construct in which beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes accompanying subordinate identities create hyper-visibility in the workplace and grant them vulnerable status due to their minority status and lack of numerical representation (Kanter, 1977). In *Men and Women of the Corporation*, Kanter writes

Tokens are not merely deviants or people who are different from other group members along any one dimension. They are people identified by ascribed characteristics (master status such as sex, race,…) or other characteristics that carry with them a set of assumptions about culture, status, and behavior highly salient for majority category members. They differ from dominants, not in ability to do a task or in acceptance or work norms, but in terms of secondary and informal assumptions. Tokens can never be just another organizational member while their category is so rare. … In these contexts the word token reflects one's distinctiveness in the context and status as a symbol of one's kind (p. 968).

Studies suggest that Black women are often expected to be expert on Blackness, serve as mentors and guides for Black students, support peers in caring for Black students, take on uncompensated and unrecognized workloads, and expected to comply with leadership
and colleagues without disagreement (Stanley, 2020; Milner, 2020). If there is
disagreement with these tokenized expectations, self-identified Black women may face
racialized and gendered microaggressions and tropes (Kohli, 2018; Ladson-Billings,
2009). Although the term token often holds a negative connotation, Kelly (2007) argues
that successful Black teachers leverage tokenized identities to buffer against racism,
break social barriers, and achieve equity in the workplace. Referencing the social
phenomenon of tokenism, Dickens et al. (2019) suggest future directions for research,
including employment of identity negotiation theories to explore the ways in which Black
women react to pressures in intercultural settings and how these pressures factor into how
they express- or suppress- their identities.

Comparative studies regarding Black women teachers in urban schools also
explore how micro-aggressions and stereotyping emerge in interactions with school
leaders and colleagues. In her doctoral dissertation, Dunmeyer (2020) draws on Black
Feminist Thought and Womanism to suggest lack of trust stems from sustaining racial
and gender stereotypes in interactions with school leaders, microaggressions from
colleagues, and diminished social connectedness with the school. She employs narrative
inquiry and focus groups to conclude that relationships with other Black women are a
strategy that some Black women utilize to buffer against stigmatization in the school
organizational culture and re-charge after feeling pressure throughout their workday to
modify their behaviors to avoid racialized and gendered treatment. These findings are
consistent with findings by Dingus (2008) regarding significance of intra-racial
mentoring relationships among Black women teachers in urban schools. However, it is
unclear the extent to which these findings regarding intra-racial relationships among
Black women can also be applied to Black men or with school leadership who share their ethno-racial and gender backgrounds.

Research also indicates that colorblindness held by school leaders and colleagues is also harmful to the emotional and psychological wellbeing of teachers of color more broadly as well as Black women. Critical Race theorists define colorblindness as the attempt to minimize the effects of discrimination through conscious omission of differences due to social identities such as ethnicity, race, gender, and other traits (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Colorblindness is also characterized by hyper-focus on commonalities between groups of people at the expense of disregarding the historical and sociopolitical nature of identity and group membership (Fergus, 2017). Studies suggest that teachers of color experience an emotional and psychological toil due to engaging peers and school leaders, who viewed colorblindness as the appropriate response to ensure equal treatment and mitigate disproportionality among student racial groups thus resulting in racial battle fatigue (Mabokela & Madsen, 2003). More recently, Pizarro and Kohli (2020) suggest teachers of color, in their attempts to combat colorblindness, often take on unpaid racial equity work by advocating for students and their families. Based on narrative excerpts from participant surveys, the data suggests that engaging in equity work may incur marginalization from white colleagues as they often express frustration and fragility at their colleagues’ calling attention to issues of race in the school. In a narrative study of Black women teachers engaged in racial equity work, Lisle-Johnson and Kohli (2020) suggest this emotional and psychological toil is heightened when educators are vulnerable to multiple intersections of oppression due to their social identities. Lisle-Johnson and Kohli suggest that while school structural conditions
engender policies and practices that may obscure the advocacy efforts of Black women, schools can counter these through implementing diversity initiatives that foster workplace inclusion such as implicit bias training.

Sociocultural Conditions

Sociocultural conditions are related to attitudes for teaching and learning (Klar, 2012; White, 2018). Simply put, this describes, "what and how teachers should teach in a given schools" and the ideologies about what knowledge counts, "how knowledge is presented and shared", and disposition towards "non-dominant knowledge" (White, 2018, p. 30). White (2018) argues that the "politics of culture and knowledge" in urban schools enact "sites of struggle between teachers and school leaders, particular for [teachers of color]" (p. 30).

Discipline First, Instruction Second

One dominant argument to increase ethno-racial diversity in the teacher workforce is that teachers of color are often perceived as more effective with students of color (Blake et al., 2016; Brockenbrough, 2015). As a result, teachers of color- most often Black men- are often called upon to hold disciplinary roles within their school which inadvertently de-emphasize their prowess as classroom leaders. Bristol and Mentor argue this stereotype characterizes the workplace experiences of Black males, who find themselves positioned by their leadership “to serve as disciplinarians first and educators second” (p. 220). Although largely under-reported in teacher diversity literature, data from previous pilot studies suggest this phenomenon may be shared by Black women teachers as well.
In a pilot study preceding this dissertation regarding the perception of workplace experiences of five Black women teachers, one veteran teacher stated:

"I think if you are a black teacher and if you have proven yourself to be able to manage a classroom, the level of support you receive in my opinion is not as much as other teachers. There's almost this assumption that 'she has it'. In my experience, I became a model classroom and I kind of felt that it was because I had strong management….”.

In this excerpt, the participant denotes the school’s emphasis on managing students to the point that her classroom is considered an exemplary classroom because students demonstrate compliance to her directions and expectations. However, she describes a lack of support (in this instance, leadership attention to enhance her pedagogical skills through being assigned a coach or sent to professional development) because of the perception that “she has it”. It is evident here that the teacher perceived school administrators minimized the value of her professional growth by reducing her pedagogical competence to the role of a disciplinarian.

**Pedagogical Approaches**

Studies indicate many teachers of color incorporate pedagogical approaches that connect to students’ home and community backgrounds. These methods are neither prescriptive nor identical (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). However, they do share common characteristics (Gaias et al., 2019). Ladson-Billings (1995), explains culturally informed approaches as good teaching coupled with cultural competence and critical consciousness. Like Freire’s (2000) concept of *conscientização*,
Ladson’s interpretation of culturally informed approaches is characterized by educators who demonstrate a sociopolitical orientation towards teaching and learning, regard the classroom as a site for disrupting structural and institutional inequalities particularly for historically marginalized groups, and equip students with knowledge and skills to identify, critique, and act against inequality. Elsewhere, teachers of color are characterized by interpreting curriculum and pedagogy through the lens of culture, incorporating aspects of students’ ethnoracial or linguistic heritage into the classroom (Achinstein et al., 2012; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1997, 2002; Dickar, 2008). Despite these positive attributes, many studies also indicate teachers of color- and Black women teachers in particular- experience mixed messaging about culturally informed teaching methods. While some describe that Black teachers are celebrated for their ability to connect with Black students (Clark, et al., 2013), Black teachers simultaneously face opposition when these strategies are perceived to conflict with school curriculum and standards-based instruction (Achinstein et al., 2010). Moreover, some studies indicate Black teachers utilize culturally informed approaches to support students acquiring skills to buffer stigma including from white staff members (Duncan, 2020).

This view is shared by Watson (2017), who employed a phenomenological design over a two-year period to explore teaching practices of early career millennial Black women teachers. Through observation and interview data, Watson suggests Black women displayed a consistent intentionality in planning and delivery of classroom content to address issues such as institutional historical and contemporary practices, seeking to eradicate assumptions they encountered in the curriculum that minimized or overlooked issues of race. This is rooted in a larger legacy of social justice-oriented and activism
pedagogies among which harken back to early roots of Black education and the legacies of Black women teachers such as Anna Julia Cooper and Septima Poinsette Clark (Johnson, 2017). Guided by Womanist theories, Beauboeuf-Lafontant (1997, 2002) suggests social justice-oriented and activism pedagogies are also rooted in othermothering, sense of maternal care and urgency to foster student sociopolitical consciousness and community uplift. Dixson and Dingus (2007) convey that advocacy and community uplift for one’s ethnic-racial community undergird how Black women teachers are socialized into the teaching profession and inform their teaching philosophy. Through use of ethnographic methods, Dixson and Dingus also explore how these pedagogies are handed from one generation to the next.

Adoption of social justice-oriented and activism pedagogies, however, may contradict sociocultural conditions for teaching and learning which create tensions for how Black women choose to respond. Hancock et al. (2020) argue Black women often face mental and emotional stress related to defying sociocultural expectations for teaching and learning in urban schools. These stresses are linked to leadership opposition to classroom activism and use of cultural informed teaching methods. Through use of a single-participant case study, Hancock and her co-researchers explain how one woman was chastised for teaching too many books by Black authors. While Black women pedagogy is marked by a social justice-orientation and activism, “New Taylorism” in conjunction with other variables such as curricular focus on standards-based instruction, test performance, and standardization may generate a conflict between how Black women perceive their commitment to education and job-related expectations. Olitsky (2020) draws from the experiences of a single case- Kayla- from a larger multi-year case study
in a bounded school district. Olitsky theorizes that Kayla attributed her satisfaction to teaching Black students because of their shared racial identity and her commitment to community uplift. However, imposed professional expectations such as adherence to school curriculum, prescribed classroom management strategies, and mandated demerit systems generated a conflict between how she perceived herself as a caring, culturally responsive educator and the sociocultural conditions in the school. In response to this tension, Kayla chose to resist policies that she perceived to be abrasive, drawing attention to the ways in which school policies problematicized student ethnic-racial and cultural identities. While Olitsky described how Kayla experienced tensions and shifted her actions to resist oppressive policies over time, these findings would be amplified with a larger participant sample to understand heterogeneity of responses from Black women about school sociocultural conditions.

Many studies have explored the relationship between working conditions as a factor shaping professional experiences and decision-making of teachers of color in urban schools. In particular, numerous studies imply a relationship between different dimensions of working conditions and their turnover decisions. While many of the studies reviewed here employ qualitative design to explore how Black women perceive working conditions, professional experiences, and decision-making, there is a gap in the literature in terms of how racialized and gendered socialization in schools influence how one chooses to express their identity and conscious or unconscious decisions to negotiate one’s identity amidst working conditions. Moreover, few researchers employ narrative design as well as theories that lend themselves to understanding both intersectionality and identity negotiation. Dickens et al. (2019) raises this concern in their theoretical analysis.
of Black women leaders in business settings and suggests identity management theories lend themselves to understanding how Black women may feel pressure to adapt their worldview and behaviors in the workplace to ascribe to professional expectations. It is upon this void in the literature and recommendations from prior research that I base both my theoretical and methodological decisions for this research. In this next section, I explain my choice of theories for this research.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1989; 1990) and Cultural Contract Paradigm (Jackson, 2002; 2004). In this section, I first describe Black Feminist Thought, which lends itself to conceptualize matters related to overlapping identities. Then, I discuss Cultural Contract Theory as a tool to explain how and why Black women negotiate their identities in schools.

Black Feminist Thought

This study draws on Black Feminist Thought because it centers Black women's lived experiences and regards these as a credible source of truth and knowledge. This is particularly important in a climate that systematically silences and invalidates Black women's claims (Collins, 1989, 1990). Through the nature of their historically situated and sociopolitical consciousness, Collins (1989) writes, “African-American women, as a group, experience a different world than those who are not Black and female” (p. 747). A distinct yet related concept is intersectionality, which is a prism for understanding how social inequalities are compounded by the presence of multiple identities (Crenshaw,
In her legal scholarship, Kimberle Crenshaw (1990) argues "ignoring differences within groups contributes to tension among groups, another problem of identity politics which bears on efforts to politicize violence against women" (p. 357). Although some Black Feminist texts generalize the experiences of women of color (Crenshaw, 1990), this study focuses on the ethno-racial and gender identities of teachers who self-identify as Black women. The purpose of this clarification is to respect the unique educational legacy and contributions of Black women teachers that are unshared by other teachers of color as well as women teachers. In this section, I will discuss the epistemological assumptions underlying Black Feminist Thought and why these assumptions are appropriate to explain this research. In this next section, I will discuss two themes of Black Feminist Thought that guide this study and their relevance to the research questions.

**Black Feminist Epistemology: Black Woman Standpoint**

Black Feminist Thought is an appropriate explanatory device for the racialized and gendered experiences of Black women teachers because of its underlying epistemological assumptions: Black feminist standpoint. Standpoint is characterized by the following components:

1. It argues that knowledge is socially situated (Harding, 1993).
2. It challenges traditional gatekeepers of knowledge which are perpetuated by Eurocentric and masculinist standards (Collins, 1990). In a hierarchy of socially constructed identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation among
other markers, these standards are created and reinforced by those whose dominant identities grant them power (Collins, 2000; Harding, 1993).

3. It acknowledges the legitimacy of the lived experiences of the historically and socio-politically disenfranchised and marginalized "at the bottom of such social hierarchies" and argues their lived experiences, perspectives, and activities provide starting points for scholarship that critiques social order (Harding, 1993, p. 55).

4. It asserts that examination of social order from the perspective of the historically and socio-politically disenfranchised can be a vehicle for social change through posing critical questions (Harding, 1993).

Black Feminist Thought valorizes the perspective of the socially ignored or devalued individuals—those whom society has ascribed subordinate by nature of their socially constructed identities. However, it is important to note that it doesn't hold an ethnocentric view regarding the superiority of Black women nor a hierarchy of oppression that insists that Black women are the most oppressed of all social groups. This is important because this research is situated within a larger concern regarding the social problem of teacher attrition and its undermining role in increasing the ethno-racial diversity of the public teacher workforce. While there is historical and sociopolitical precedent that argues that the most neglected person in America is the Black woman (X, 1962), this research chooses to examine the phenomena of workplace experiences for this population to better understand its relationship to teacher turnover.
Theme #1: Overlapping Identities and Systems of Oppression.

Black Feminist theorists suggest that presence of multiple subordinate social identities heighten one's vulnerability to oppression. This core theme suggests intersectional oppressions are maintained through "controlling images…designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (p. 69). Collins (2000) argues the creation and re-interpretation of these gendered racial symbols of Black womanhood through tropes such as the Mammy, the Matriarch, the Welfare Queen, the Hoochie, and the Black lady foster an ideological justification for race, gender, and class oppression. Collins suggests that even when "controlling images disappear", they continue to "subjugate US Black women by...maintaining intersecting oppressions" (Collins, 2002, pp. 60; see also Mullings, 2000). For example, public debates about images of Aunt Jemima and Mrs. Butterworth on corporate brands surfaced following the police killings of Breonna Taylor among others in the racial re-awakening of Summer 2020. While some argue these are neutral images, other arguments suggest these are caricatures that sanitize racialized tropes for public consumption and brand loyalty (Thomas et al., 2020). While many of these caricatures have begun to be removed from public displays (Walker, 2020), the underlying ideological presumption of these images continue to reify subordinate status of the Black woman.

Collins argues cultural institutions like the media and government agencies have produced and disseminated these racialized, gendered, and classist ideologies. Of particular concern in this argument is the social organization of schools in reproducing
these ideologies. In one instance, Morris (2016) argues that ethno-racial imparity between teachers and students renders Black girls vulnerable to racialized and gendered stereotypes even when demonstrating the same behaviors as white girls. In a pilot study to this one regarding how Black women’s’ relationships with instructional leaders, one participant revealed multiple instances when a leader prefaced feedback about her classroom practice by saying, "I don't want to get you angry", and "I don't want to get you mad". Due to an ongoing pattern of this behavior, the participant internalized that her leader's conception of her was as an Angry Black Woman, a gendered racial stereotype based suggesting that emotions make a Black woman aggressive or even violent (Jones & Norwood, 2016). Collins (2000) also writes that even in one's resistance to these controlling images, it is possible to ascribe racialized and gendered tropes to other Black women thus becoming complicit in their oppression.

Collins argues that Black institutions may also perpetuate controlling images of Black women and therefore by complicit in reinforcing intersecting oppressions. For example, organizations may challenge racialized oppression but inadvertently reproduce heterosexism. Collins argues that these sites may socialize Black women to consider their own liberation from oppression as Black women to be intertwined or secondary to the collective uplift of the Black community. This surfaces an opportunity to complicate our understanding of the professional experiences and decision-making of Black women teachers as a limited number of studies to date explore how gender factors into intra-racial interactions and encounters in urban schools.
Theme #2: Resistance

Collins suggests a longstanding tradition of Black women resistance to intersecting oppressions. Although presence of multiple subordinate social identities heightens one's vulnerability to oppression, Collins argues that subordinate status implied by socially imposed categories of identity equip Black women to be "strong-willed resisters", not "defenseless victims" (p. 98). Audre Lorde (1984) writes: “visibility which makes us most vulnerable”— that which accompanies being Black— “is also the source of our greatest strength” (p. 42). In this manner, the consciousness of Black women is characterized by an acute awareness of stereotypes and tropes, efforts to reject internalized oppression, and movement towards creating an independent sense of self that is necessary to survive (Collins, 2002). Collins describes this as self-definition.

Self-definition is the internal construction and development of one's conception of sense. It is characterized as an individual and collective process of empowerment, reclamation of worth and dignity, and declaration of one's independence, and change. Self-definition is an individual process with personal and collective benefits of liberation and healing (Collins, 1989, 2002; see also Dunmeyer, 2020). In commenting about role of community and self-definition, Collins (2000) writes:

By persisting in the journey toward self-definition, as individuals, we are changed. When linked to group action, our individual struggles gain new meaning. Because our actions as individuals change the world from one in which we merely exist to one over which we have some control, they enable us to see everyday life as being in process and therefore amenable to change. Perhaps that is why so many African American women have managed to persist and 'make a way out of no way.' Perhaps they knew the power of self-definition. (p. 121)

This act of community-oriented empowerment and interdependence is antithetical to Western, capitalism which elevates personal advancement over the collective good
In the context of community, Black women can pursue self-definition through reclaiming their voice in the context of safe spaces in which they can engage in resisting controlling images imposed by a Eurocentric and masculinist society.

Not all Black women engage in self-definition as described in this section. Collins suggests that there are diverse reactions in which Black women negotiate their identities in response to the external definitions associated with ethno-racial and gender group memberships. Some Black women engage in denial of controlling images but asserting that stereotypes and tropes are fitting for other Black women but not them. Other Black women engage in duality, appearing to silently comply with externally imposed definitions of inferiority yet taking on a deliberate stand to resist conceptions of inferiority to assert their self-dignity and self-worth. Collins argues this heterogeneity of Black women's reactions to stigmatization is an opportunity for collective resistance against intersecting oppressions. She writes: “Understanding the contours of this heterogeneity generally, and how U.S. Black women can be better equipped to resist this negative treatment, constitutes one important task for U.S. Black feminist thought” (p. 93).

Using narrative inquiry as a tool, this research endeavors to uncover the heterogeneity that exists among women teachers in the African diaspora in America. Specifically, Black Feminist Thought lends itself to unpack the range of participants’ decision-making and professional experiences revealed by answering the first two research questions. Although Black Feminist Thought also framed analysis of research question three, this question is concerned with identity negotiation. Guided by the presumption of heterogeneity among Black women (Collins, 1989, 1990, 2002), diversity
of reactions to controlling images (Collins, 2002), and hypervisibility due to multiple subordinate identities (Dickens et al., 2019), I look to a second theory to understand factors undergirding how Black women may negotiate their identities in urban schools.

*Cultural Contract Theory*

Cultural Contract Theory lends itself to exploring the diverse reactions of Black women in response to hypervisibility of intersecting identities and controlling images regarding their race and gender social group. It is part of a larger canon of identity shifting literature and communication theory. I suggest Cultural Contract Theory lends itself to examining decisions that Black women make to manage their social identities in response to school working conditions and potential pressure(s) that Black women may feel to "assimilate to the dominant culture or alternatively retain their cultural identities" (Dickens et al., 2019, p. 155).

Cultural Contract Theory (Jackson, 2002) is an "interdisciplinary paradigm that can be used to assess identity issues that are rhetorical/discursive, organizational, [and] interpersonal" (p. 365). It is predicated upon the following assumptions regarding identity:

1. Identity is a social process that reflects both self-concept (how I see myself) and worldview (how I see others)
2. Identity, at its core, includes immovable and fluid components
3. Identity is co-constructed and managed within the context of interpersonal relationships and environmental encounters
4. Performance of identity may shift in response to real or perceived cues or conflict from interactants or the environment

Drawing on identity development theories such as Cross’s Nigrescence Model (Cross et al., 1991; Cross, 1995), Jackson (2002) utilizes the term “culture” to describe one’s beliefs regarding group membership, perception of social belonging, and adherence to worldview and behaviors associated with said group. Jackson argues the development of one's cultural identity is internally constructed. In addition, external significance can only be ascribed once personal meaning is attached to ethno-racial identity and group membership. This concept resists static and essentialist notions of being "culturally Black", rather it describes a developmental socialization by which one ascribes significance to their social identities and commitment to others with whom they share group membership.

Elsewhere, Jackson defines culture as a "set of norms or standards" that are guideposts for how we define ourselves and coordinate our identities in response to individuals and institutions whose positionalities are similar or different from our own (p. 361). Cultural Contract Theory assumes these intercultural difference surfaces conflict- a term defined here as "misalignment" and without positive or negative connotations. Although Jackson’s theory is situated within the context of Black-white intercultural difference, works by Burk (2007), Drummond and Orbe (2010), and Drummond (2016) extend this paradigm by exploring how identity is transacted within and among other racially minoritized groups. Additionally, Dickens (2014) explores intercultural dynamics within and across social class. As such, Cultural Contracts are a tool to understand how Black women “seek to manage, contain, and control” their identities through identity
negotiations- conscious shifts of behavior- to address difference and mitigate conflict (Jackson, 2002, p. 359). Addressing intercultural conflict across different intersections of identity can be a gateway to valuation of difference, but it can also incur pressure to engage in identity shifting or adapting aspects of their being in response to perceived or actual threat of stigmatization or for the purpose of achieving social belonging.

Whereas Black Feminist theorists suggest Black women respond in diverse ways to intersecting oppressions, Cultural Contract Theory posits three types of contracts to describe how Black women shift their values, language, actions, or attitudes in response to cues in the environment, interpersonal interactions, or group encounters. These are:

1. *Ready to Sign the Contracts*: This status describes one’s willingness to adapt to the cultural norms present in the environment. Jackson characterizes this contract as a “pre-negotiation” or willingness to shift their behaviors because of the environmental pressures. Engagement in *ready to sign contracts* infer maintenance of the status quo and a power asymmetry that places pressure to forgo cultural worldview and behavior for sake of survival or achieving desired ends. For some Black women, *ready to sign contracts* may explain identity shifting behaviors during an interview because the teacher candidate found themselves dependent on the job because of no other prospects. *Ready to sign contracts* may also be the result of “managing the expectations and values associated with their roles in Black communities” (Dickens & Chavez, 2018, p. 761).

2. *Quasi-completed Contracts*: This refers to adaptation of one’s identity to address the demands of the dominant cultural norms. This is akin to straddling a fence;
while one may seemingly adhere to the dominant culture, there is also a deep-rooted loyalty and participation to one’s cultural means of expression. *Quasi-completed contracts* may explain how Black women reconcile school structural and organizational expectations regarding instruction and incorporate culturally informed approaches to support students.

3. *Co-Created Contracts:* This refers to a mutual valuation between two parties. This status affirms subordinate and minoritized cultural identity behaviors, worldviews, and values by the dominant groups without subjecting these to change. From the perspective of the dominant group, this may mean “I am comfortable with you and value you for whom you are, and I am not interested in changing you in any way” (Jackson, 2002, p. 49). Although Jackson (2002) describes how co-created contracts may surface intergroup harmony between Black and white individuals, this theory has been used to explain relationships marked by satisfaction and acceptance instead of obligation and coercion across and within minoritized groups (Drummond, 2016).

Cultural Contract Theory suggests the "signing" of these contracts may be conscious or unconscious processes, long-term or in-the-moment decisions. Since multiple, intersecting identities extrapolate the standpoint of Black women, these identities may be negotiated simultaneously. In some instances, *quasi-completed* and *ready to sign contracts* may involve shifting from one's cultural worldview and behaviors to ascribe to the dominant culture in order to avoid negative associations with controlling images (e.g., stereotypes and tropes) and increase social belonging, particularly in environments in which there is underrepresentation from one's cultural group. This may
include mitigating one's dress to reduce stigma and reduce visibility in the environment. It may also include shifting one's worldview to align with a school's structural emphasis on testing and implementation of standardized assessments. In the context of Black women, drawing up contracts may mean changing one's mannerisms to avoid characterization of the Angry Black Woman. However, Jackson suggests that consistent and conscious participation in *ready to sign* and *quasi-completed contracts* over time undermine opportunities for *co-created contracts*, suggesting that mutual valuation is predicated upon one's commitment to their own cultural identity.

Drawing contracts may allow Black women to develop and expand their identities. It allows one to establish commonality with others across ethno-racial and gender lines. It may also be a pathway to generate and foster intercultural relationships. However, Jackson argues there may also be costs to drawing contracts other than *co-created contracts*, including erosion of self-valuation, criticism of one's decision-making, perception of inauthenticity, or incompatibility between one's actions in social settings and one's cultural language, behaviors, attitudes, or values. This may also be linked with racialized stress and trauma with physical and psychological effects.

Previous scholars draw on Cultural Contract Theory to explore how ethno-racial identity is exchanged in everyday encounters. Drummond and Orbe (2010) employ Cultural Contracts to explain how ethno-racially homogenous groups describe their intentions behind drawing up cultural contracts and how identity shifts are a manifestation of these contracts. Across the 13 focus groups, participant discussion of signed contracts was implicit. Themes emerged across groups that intercultural interactions shaped how they defined and perceived their own identities. This was
particularly salient for participants who were born outside of the United States and drew *ready to sign contracts*, attempting to reconcile their own cultural identities with the American concept of race. Despite discomfort with racialized terms imposed upon them, findings indicate participants perceived adapting to this system reflected larger benefits of assimilation and social belonging in American society. Drummond and Orbe argue, however, that enactment of *ready to sign contracts* maintained the racial status quo as participants identifying as people of color used racial terms but did not understand issues of power and privilege that accompany racial categories. In contrast, some participants engaged in *quasi-completed cultural contracts*, resisting essentialized racial classifications and dictating the terms by which they are categorized.

Drummond and Orbe denote themes surrounding *co-created contracts* surfaced less often during focus groups. These were organized into two categories: *co-created contracts* within ethno-racial groups and *co-created contracts* across ethno-racial groups. In both instances, however, participants discussed instances of mutual valuation from other minoritized groups.

Similarly, Harris (2007) calls upon Cultural Contracts in conjunction with Black Feminist Thought in an auto-ethnographic study to explain how she negotiates her identity as a Black woman in intercultural interactions with her white students in a college setting. Although her students are in a subordinate position as university undergraduates, Harris explains they are members of the cultural majority in the context of academia and hold power. She notes student behaviors (such as refusal to call her "professor" and use of her first name instead) attempt to impose their cultural norm while also communicating a racialized and gendered defiance of her authority. However, Harris
maintains co-created contracts through insisting student use of her professional title. Through use of Cultural Contract Theory, Harris argues that she is able to extend Black Feminist Though to explore the varies strategies which Black women use to resist and challenge racialized and gendered experiences that shape their professional experiences.

Dickens (2016; see also Dickens et al., 2019) also employs Cultural Contracts to explain identity negotiation as a factor contributing to the professional experiences and decision-making of Black women. Using phenomenological design, Dickens concludes a distinction of contracts drawn by Black women in primarily white social and professional contexts than in majority Black environments. She explores Jackson's (2002; 2002) assumption regarding the underlying costs and benefits to identity negotiation.

Using narrative data drawn from ten Black women, Dickens argues that participants (or co-researchers as she calls them) tightly managed their identity in predominantly white social and professional settings through use of ready to sign contracts. Participant narrative indicates adaption to Eurocentric professional norms and behaviors to gain employment, advance professionally, and mitigate instances of potential- and actual- racialized and gendered discrimination (such as perceptions of being aggressive or “angry”). Examples of Eurocentric professional norms and gendered behaviors include conscious attention to a quiet tone of voice, use of vocabulary, and even clothing to evade stereotypes associated with Black women. In one instance, a participant even described paying specific attention to her clothing options to eliminate potential hyper-sexualization by co-workers and being perceived as a Jezebel. Participants perceived benefits of identity negotiation included social belonging and avoidance of racialized and gendered treatment; however, they indicated that constant
negotiation of their identity consumed psychological resources. Once psychological resources were exhausted, participants admitted to being silent or frozen during racialized and gendered encounters and interactions, unwilling or unable to persist in adapting behaviors to accommodate the expectations of their professional context. In some instances, participants regard depletion of psychological resources incurred by identity negotiation leading to inauthentic relationships and lack of overall connectedness to the workplace.

Contrary to expectation, Dickens found that participants also drew ready to sign contracts in predominantly Black contexts to accommodate to social expectations and norms which they perceived were held by other members of the Black community. This illustrates the utility of Cultural Contracts Theory as a tool to explore various dimensions of social location, including ethno-racial identity, gender, and social class. Seven out of ten participants acknowledged negotiating their identities and adjusting their language, downplaying educational attainment, and changing mannerisms to avoid other appearances of elitism, fear of being labeled "bougie" or accusations of "acting white". They attributed this change in their behavior to both controlling images which they perceived were internalized by some Black people in their contexts as well as minimize differences imposed by gender or social class distinctions. Although participants engaged in ready to sign contracts to promote social belonging, pervasive identity negotiation led many participants to withdraw from their personal relationships and the social environment at times. They found these identity negotiations- even in the context of other Black people- to be incompatible with their authentic selves. This finding, while preliminary, suggests that multiple intersecting identities shape decision-making to
negotiate identity in each context based on the perceived expectations of the dominant culture that is present. This finding has implications for the ways in which Black women may negotiate their identities in a room of white men or white females versus the ways they may feel pressured to adapt behaviors in a room of Black men or a room of Black females who belong to a different social class.

In general, this data conveys intersecting identities factored into participants' identity negotiation and that variables in the environment influenced their decision-making. Taken together, identity negotiation characterized their daily lives; while participants perceived engaging in ready to sign contracts was a pathway to increase social belonging and mitigate discrimination, they encountered depletion of psychological resources and contradiction between the contracts they signed and their authentic selves.

Whereas previous studies indicate ready to sign contracts as win-lose and maintenance of the status quo, Drummond (2016) explores intercultural perceptions of mother-son relationships to indicate that some participants perceive benefits in co-signing the mama's boy identity imposed by their mothers. Although these findings were determined through narrative excerpts from male participants, I suggest they complicate how we view ready to sign contracts and the ways in which adapting one's identity to maintain the status quo may complicate our understanding of the professional experiences and decision-making of Black women teachers.

Additional studies draw on Cultural Contract Theory to explore expectations for assimilation as prerequisite for success in Eurocentric environments (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004), implicit demands to abandon indigenous cultural identities and behaviors
(Lamsam, 2014), and downplaying racialized and gendered mistreatment (Parker, 2002). In each of these, the predominance of ready to sign contracts and co-created contracts implies individuals are often faced with pressures to shift identities in the workplace. This hypothesis is substantiated by the fact that there remains little evidence of co-created contracts particularly in intercultural interpersonal encounters and institutions. It may be the case, however, that co-created contracts may surface as Cultural Contract Theory continues to be utilized in different contexts. To my knowledge, this will be the first study to apply Cultural Contracts to explore issues related to K-12 teachers in urban schools.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of factors that shape experiences, decision-making, and the ways in which intersectionality and identity negotiation lend themselves to understanding how teachers of color engage in decision making and experience working conditions. Here, I summarize the distinct bodies of teacher diversity literature discussed in this chapter, discuss gaps in existing knowledge, and outline how my study will add to existing knowledge in this area.

In this chapter, I first point to turnover as the key phenomenon that maintains pervasive ethno-racial imparities in the teacher workforce and exacerbates issues related to a leaky teacher pipeline. While there has been substantive growth among some POC groups, multiple studies employ national and state-level data to conclude that disproportionate turnover among Black teachers (and particularly Black women) undermines three decades of concerted policy and practice to augment the ethno-racial makeup of the teacher workforce.
Following contemporary trends in teacher turnover, I examined reasons that explain the turnover phenomenon and how these reasons may differ by ethno-racial group membership. In this literature review, I draw on multiple studies that agree that school and student demographic factors predict departure among white teachers. While many teachers of color are drawn to work with students of color as well as work in low-income urban communities, researchers explain these often do not factor into their decisions to leave. Concerning Black women, contemporary trends indicate that job dissatisfaction with working conditions factored into decision-making than other variables. However, I argue that this data must be interpreted with caution because of inconsistent disaggregation in the collection and analysis of SASS and TFS surveys and lack of updated, longitudinal data. Moreover, I argue qualitative methods are best employed to explore the relationship between professional experiences and decision-making.

Third, I explored qualitative literature regarding factors into perceptions of working conditions and how this shapes professional experiences and decision-making in urban schools. However, there are unanswered questions, particularly around how Black women teachers negotiate their intersectional identities within and across ethno-racial and gender lines and how these factor into their professional experiences and decision-making.

Fourth, I explained my choices of Black Feminist Thought and Cultural Contract Theory in the theoretical framework. I suggest that Black Feminism lends itself to explore emic perspectives of Black women teachers, particularly in how intersecting identities factor into professional experiences and decision-making. I also take cues from recommendations in peer-reviewed articles by employing Cultural Contracts to explain
how Black women may shift their worldviews and behaviors in response to school working conditions.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the methodological decisions and assumptions that undergird this study. In addition, I describe the research design, including procedures for participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis. Researcher reflexivity and study limitations are also discussed.

Research Methods, Design, and Rationale

This research is guided by qualitative methodology, whose assumptions are consistent with my own philosophies regarding knowledge and truth. In this section, I will briefly describe the ontological and epistemic assumptions of qualitative research, relevant qualitative paradigms and explain the alignment of these elements to the design of this study.

Ontological and Epistemic Assumptions of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is undergirded with the ontological assumption that rejects the notion of a singular and objective reality. Instead, the ontology of qualitative research suggests the existence of multiple, socially constructed realities that are bound in time, space, and geographic location. This assumption aligns with how ethno-racial, and gender identities are defined in this research in that they are socially constructed, subject to
cultural interpretation, and context specific. Additionally, the ontological assumptions of qualitative research assert that reality is constructed through human experience. This aligns with my choice of narrative design, which uses stories as evidence to determine how participants experience the workplace. Taken together, these ontological assumptions allow for an exploration of the complex ways in which individuals construct their reality and how these constructions continue to evolve over time (Mertens, 2014).

Whereas ontology asks the question, “What is the nature of reality?” (Lincoln & Guba, 2005), epistemology explores how knowledge is constructed. Qualitative epistemology suggests that the pursuit of knowledge is predicated upon prolonged engagement with participants and/or the research context to draw emic understanding of the phenomena (Steup, 2005). Through the implementation of narrative inquiry and multiple semi-structured interviews, I achieved a deep level of engagement with participants to advance my understanding of their standpoint. I also collected multiple data sources for the purpose of triangulation and achieved a nuanced understanding regarding the complexity of participants’ experiences as self-identified Black women with unique standpoints and histories.

**Qualitative Research Paradigms: Constructivism and Transformativism**

Qualitative research is linked with the constructivist paradigm, which rests on the assumption that individual meaning making of reality and truth are socially constructed. This paradigm originated in phenomenology and hermeneutics, an interpretive process often applied to historical documents in which social and cultural contexts are examined to deduce an author’s meaning of the text. Applying this approach, researchers operating
with a constructivist paradigm must enter the research context and engage deeply with participants in order to examine the complexity of their lived experience, perspective, and ultimately, participant standpoint.

The constructivist paradigm, however, has also been heavily resisted by proponents of the transformative paradigm. The transformative paradigm emerged in the 20th century and is consistent with the values of critical and feminist researchers, who posited the conventions of Western research to be a "colonizing instrument that continues to define those from former colonies, and all departments of their lives as 'the other'" (Chilisa, 2005, p. 662). Mertens (2014) characterizes the transformative paradigm through the following tenets:

- Generates awareness to matters pertaining to oppression and marginalization by Eurocentric and masculinist cultural norms.
- Uses scientific processes to uncover how social inequality is reproduced and resisted.
- Normalizes the standpoint of historically minoritized and marginalized groups.
- Characterized by researcher care and concern with "the universal problem of human freedom" (King, 2005, p. 5 as cited in Mertens, 2014, p. 25).
- Oriented towards a theory of social change and justice.

I find these tenets to be appealing, challenging, and necessary to engage the political battleground of urban schools. In addition, these tenets are consistent with the procedures that guided this research. This study aims to generate awareness of conditions that may subject teachers of color- and Black teachers in particular- to working conditions in which they experience racism, sexism, and other forms of intersecting oppressions. As
such, the design of the research— including narrative design, surveys, open-ended questions, and multiple semi-structured interviews— helped to uncover the ways in which aspects of school workplace ecology influence their professional experiences and decision-making. Additionally, critical theories lent themselves to exploring how resistance is possible despite oppressive elements of school workplace ecology. Guided by the standpoints of self-identified Black women of the African diaspora, this study draws attention to issues of power and inequality in urban schools and yields principles that can be used to critically examine policies and practices that enhance- or limit- meaningful inclusion of minoritized communities.

Narrative Inquiry

In this section, I describe the rationale undergirding the use of narratives. This study employs a narrative design. Narrative design "begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 100). This research design locates participant stories in their social and cultural contexts (Clandinin, 2016). Although I employed a case study design in previous pilot studies, I utilized narrative design because of its alignment with the theoretical frameworks that guide this study to center participants’ epistemological truths and the ways in which they interpreted their experiences and decision-making based on internal and external factors.

Additionally, narrative inquiry is the systematic examination of stories communicated orally or through writing. As such, data collection in narrative design is not limited to the solicitation of participant narratives; it also includes other qualitative sources such as participant observation data, pictures, social media, and other qualitative
documents to draw understanding of individual stories and lived experiences. As such, I asked participants to complete a demographic survey, three short written responses to open-ended questions, and three semi-structured interviews about their experiences and decision-making in the workplace. Some participants also shared photos and other personal mementos that gave context about their professional experiences, decision-making, and identity negotiation in the workplace. Taken together, the collection of multiple types of stories was informed by narrative design and the epistemological assumptions of Black Feminist Thought and Cultural Contract Theory that individuals employ a variety of story-telling strategies to convey how they make meaning of their lived realities and negotiated their identities in the workplace.

Researcher Reflexivity

I was hyper-aware of my positionality as a multi-racial Latina as an independent researcher on this project. In this section, I elaborate on the opportunities and limitations afforded in this research in relation to my positionality and social location. I also acknowledge the inherent power dynamics that surface in the researcher-participant relationship. This section also showcases three strategies that I implemented during the study to build rapport and trust with participants.

Positionality

As a multi-racial Latina and former teacher and school leader in urban schools, I am compelled towards action-oriented research to expose and dismantle institutions that reproduce Eurocentric, masculinist norms, and enact oppressive working conditions for
teachers of color that undermine efforts to increase teacher diversity. In my previous work as an instructional leader and coach, I have been at times complicit in enacting policies and practices that did not consider the intersectionality nor the ways in which gendered racialization in schools reflects a social hierarchy (Omi & Winant, 1986). As such, I approached this study as an opportunity to (re)learn human-centered instructional leadership and management practices directly from women who are experts in their own experiences.

My background in urban schools taken together with my social location granted me both insider and outsider status as a researcher. During my interactions with participants, I drew on my own experiential knowledge and standpoint as a minoritized woman educator who has worked in schools that primarily served Black and Latino/x students in low-income communities. In fact, listening to participants’ stories facilitated introspection about my own motivation for working in urban schools, aspirations for leadership, observations about elements of school working conditions, and interpersonal dynamics that I’ve experienced firsthand or observed. I also drew on cultural knowledge derived from living in segregated neighborhoods in Philadelphia to understand the references, jokes, and colloquialisms made by participants. Although I drew on my experiences as a multi-racial woman of color in urban schools in designing and executing this study, I was also hyper-aware of my unearned privileges that positioned me differently in comparison to participants. Namely, I considered the ways in which anti-Blackness was pervasive in my own upbringing through implicit and explicit color-muted messaging by my parents and extended family members (Pollock, 2009).
In fact, anti-Blackness is deeply rooted in Latinidad and is deeply interconnected to the legacy of colonialism as well as racial, cultural, and linguistic genocide (García-Peña, 2016; Castellanos, 2017). To explain one’s identity as multi-racial yet claim to be exposed to anti-blackness appears to be contradictory but in Latinidad, these seemingly oppositional concepts are quite commonplace. My mother is a third generation Puertorriqueña and her own racial history can be traced back to the Sephardic Jews from the Canary Islands. My father is from the Dominican Republic, an island that has its own deep rooted anti-Black tensions including genocide with its neighbor, Haiti. As a child, I knew my father was dark-skinned, but Blackness was not discussed and although there were family whispers of a great-grandmother that was Haitian, this aspect of our ancestry was suppressed. Instead, the women in my Dominican family surveilled each other to stay out of the sun and straighten what they perceived as pelo malo in order to look presentable. On my Puerto Rican side, I was referred to as la trigueña, a moniker related to the cinnamon brown tone in my skin, further establishing the disconnect between my mother's pale skin and straight Black hair with my frizzy curls and darker features. It wasn’t until I was much older that I was able to understand the relationship between the quizzical stares and countless comments within the broader schema of anti-Blackness within my family and the broader Latino community.

As a citizen, a woman of color, an educator, and a mother, I have a responsibility to identify and uproot the inerrant messaging I’ve acquired during my lifetime. Over the past 15 years, I have advanced my own understanding about the complicated nature of race and ethnicity and the social significance of these and other identity markers in the United States. Through professional development, meaningful intra-racial relationships,
critical reading and discussion, and reflection, I have done internal work to learn, unlearn, and relearn a pluralist perspective that values the contributions of historically marginalized and minoritized communities. Working with this group of participants was a formative step in my process of learning, unlearning, and re-learning. I am forever indebted to these gracious women who chose to participate in this study and whose stories helped me to reflect on my blind spots and the ways in which I still need to dismantle the problematic cultural messages conveyed to me about race.

Power and Knowledge: My Role as the Researcher

Academia has historically positioned itself as the creator and gatekeeper of knowledge-validation processes, including who creates knowledge, and whose knowledge counts (Collins, 1989). Knowledge is also a mechanism of social stratification, transmitting unearned power privileges to the “dominators” and enacting oppression to the “dominated” (Bourdieu, 1979).

These processes reflect and reinforce arbitrary social hierarchies and attempt to discredit subordinate groups from articulating their own standpoint. During this study, I was mindful of how the intersection of my own identities, experiences, and aspirations of an advanced graduate degree shaped my relationships with participants and the ways I interpreted their stories. This study represents my attempts to extrapolate “everyday knowledge” (Collins, 1989) and affirm Black women as experts in their own standpoint. To this end, it was important to engage in ongoing reflection and dialogue with my dissertation chair so that in re-storying participant narratives, I did not reproduce deficit-based, colonial practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
Building Rapport and Trust

Rapport and trust are critical elements to gain in-depth understanding of the participants’ emic perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Level of rapport and trust are also linked to the validity and trustworthiness of the research data (Guillemin & Heggen, 2009). These two elements also work in tandem. Researcher-participant relationships characterized by shared experiences, connections, and parity, can lead to trust, which in turn strengthens rapport (Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007; Tannen, 1991). As such, I used three strategies to build rapport and trust with participants.

First, I leveraged my previous professional experiences as a teacher and leader in urban schools to foster commonality with participants. I have worked in schools that were relatively diverse in terms of ethnic and racial demographics, both exceeding the state and national ratio of ethno-racial diversity. Despite this, it was typically my experience to be one of few (or the only) Latinos, and in my last school, I was the only Latina who worked there for the duration of my 6-year tenure. I was the first Latina school leader in the CMO where I previously worked and for many years, the only. I provide this context to describe the nature of my own professional experiences and how they lent themselves to build rapport with participants. For example, when participants conveyed moments of racial isolation or gendered racial stereotypes expressed by colleagues, I was able to identify with their sentiments. I also understood that despite these commonalities, our unique standpoints and social location lent themselves to experiencing these moments differently. As such, I derived empathy from my experiences; I also pushed myself to be reflective and not conflate my experiences with my participants (Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007).
Second, I developed rapport and trust through demonstrating authentic care towards participants (Collins, 1989). This includes conveying emotions such as sympathy and kindness and “balancing closeness and distance in that relationship” (Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007; see also LeCompte and Schensul, 1999; Rossman and Rallis, 1998). I did this by checking in with participants to see how they are doing at the beginning of interviews, following up regarding personal things they shared with me from prior conversations, and even communicating intermittently with participants between interviews without a self-interested agenda. For example, if I knew a participant had a birthday coming up, I sent a text. I also reached out to participants during Teacher Appreciation Week, thanking them for their service. I also took on a summer research assistantship so that I could engage in reciprocity by providing participants with a stipend for their time and emotional labor in sharing their stories.

Third, I upheld ethical standards of research, including honesty regarding the underlying motivation of this research and the parameters of participant involvement. During recruitment and at the beginning of each interview, I explained the purpose of the research, length of commitment, duration, and what I intended to accomplish with the data. I also offered to share transcripts with participants if they wanted a copy for their records. Through data collection, I also kept confidential records to maintain each participant’s privacy. Although I am accountable to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for ethical behavior, I also felt an acute sense of responsibility to the women who participated in this study.
Procedures

In this section, I explain the procedures undergirding the research design, including participant recruitment, selection, data collection, and analysis.

Participant Recruitment and Sampling

Following IRB approval in February 2021, participants were recruited via social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook. I also shared recruitment flyers via email with members of my personal and professional networks. As shown in Appendix A, the recruitment flier conveyed the purpose of the study eligibility criteria, IRB approval information, and my contact information. It also included a QR and hyperlink to complete the demographic survey (see Appendix B). Additionally, I utilized snowballing techniques by reaching out to self-identified Black women who participated in pilot studies on this topic. I asked them to consider participating as well as send the recruitment flier to interested and eligible individuals in their professional and personal networks. The following inclusion criteria determined eligibility:

- Inclusion Criterion 1: Self-identify as a Black woman. The rationale for this criterion is that the research questions necessitate that self-identified Black women tell their stories. In addition, the premise of Black women’s standpoint in Black Feminist Thought suggests that Black women alone have a unique emic perspective to observe and evaluate social phenomena based on meaning derived from their own intersecting identities and experiences.

- Inclusion Criterion 2: Have at least one year’s experience as teacher of record prior to involvement in the study. It is suggested that many first-year teachers
face a significant shift to their self-concept as professionals as they acclimate to school organizational culture, classroom management, and navigating expectations for teaching among other factors (Cook, 2009). While early career teachers beyond their first year may face similar challenges (Morrison, 2013; Pearce & Morrison, 2011), the underlying assumption of this study is that teachers beyond their second year will be able distinguish the ways in which their personal identity intersects with their workplace because of the decreased novelty of their professional identity.

- Inclusion Criterion 3: Currently employed in a school situated in a large or mid-size urban area during the study. The term “urban” in this component of the inclusion criteria is drawn from the 2010 US Census definition of urbanized area and principal city with at least 100,000 or more inhabitants.

To indicate interest, eligible candidates were invited to complete a demographic survey (see Appendix B) linked to the recruitment flier.

Participant Selection

After a three-month recruitment period, 21 self-identified Black women completed the demographic survey and indicated interest in participating. Of these 21, 18 met the inclusion criteria. I employed participant selection to identify which of the 18 interested individuals should participate in the study. Participant selection is a critical technique in which the researcher generates parameters to identify who will count as ‘data’ (Reybold et al., 2012). Informed by Creswell and Clark's (2002) guidance to solicit information-rich participants, I selected 11 self-identified Black teachers to participate in interviews. To account for some variation, my intention was to have no more than 4
teachers that overlap in the participant selection criteria although I felt short of this aspiration. Regarding selection, I also considered the level of detail in participants’ demographic survey responses as an indicator of their willingness to engage in reflective dialogue about their professional experiences, decision-making, and identity negotiation. Although all 11 teachers participated in interviews, three participants were excluded from the study because they did not remain classroom teachers for the duration of data collection. One participant moved into a district leadership position while another participant's position was dissolved by her school. Instead of pursuing employment in the United States, she chose to pursue teaching abroad full-time. The remaining teacher moved to a different state in Summer 2021. Unfortunately, she faced barriers to gaining reciprocity of her teaching credentials and was unable to secure employment as a classroom teacher. At the conclusion of the data collection, she was interviewing for substitute teacher jobs and employment outside of education. Figure 1 outlines selection criteria and the number of participants highlighted in this present study in accordance with each criterion.
This present study draws on findings of eight self-identified Black women of the African diaspora, all of whom served as classroom teachers for the duration of the data collection. Calendly was used to schedule interviews and a consent form shared with participants via email. The consent outlined the benefits of participation, including opportunity to contribute to the research base regarding issues influencing the professional experiences and decision-making of teachers of color. The consent form also indicated that participants did not bear any risk in participation and were free to withdraw at any time. Participants provided verbal consent for participation at the onset of the first interview. Participants also repeated consent to participate in a recorded interview at the beginning of each subsequent interview.
**Participant Sample**

The sample included eight ethnically diverse teachers, all of whom self-identified as Black women of the African diaspora. Table 1 conveys demographic information for each participant and is organized by their chosen pseudonym.

Three participants also self-identified in terms of their ethnic origins (representing parts of Africa and Garifuna by way of Honduras). One participant also identified as biracial. Regarding linguistic heterogeneity, three participants were bilingual and were speakers of at least one other language in addition to English. Seven participants lived in different metropolitan cities along the East Coast and one participant lived in the South.

Participants all entered teaching through varying pathways, ranging from undergraduate teacher preparation programs to alternative certification. Two participants were formerly Teacher for America teachers but chose to remain in teaching beyond the two-year obligation. All participants also worked in urban, Title 1 schools with majority Black and Hispanic/Latino students. Participants were also employed by different school types; six participants worked at different public charter schools, one at a public high school, and one at a contract school. Participants taught different subjects and grade levels and varied in terms of years of experience.

Regarding employment status, three participants returned to the same school and position at the onset of the 2021-2022 school year. A fourth teacher returned to her school but to a new position because her prior position was dissolved. The remaining four participants sought to switch schools entirely. Of the four, only two participants successfully gained new employment. The remaining two teachers returned to their
schools; one teacher moved from a content area where she was not certified to social studies (an area in which she held certification) and the other returned to the same school and same position. Finally, the three most veteran teachers were also looking to leave teaching. Two (Camile and Beyoncé) conveyed that 2021-2022 would be their last year in their schools and were considering moving out of teaching. The remaining teacher, Omi, was also looking to transition out of her current job but was undecided if she was to move out of teaching. She was actively applying for teaching as well as other roles outside of teaching.

**Table 1: Participant Demographic Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Self-Identified Race and Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>School Type, Region, and Assignment-2020 to 2021</th>
<th>School Type, Region, and Assignment-2021 to 2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Camile</td>
<td>Black (Guyanese and Ghanaian American)</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>Public Charter ● Northeast ● 9th grade social studies</td>
<td>No Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyoncé</td>
<td>Black (Nigerian American)</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>Public (Contract) School ● Northeast ● Interventionist and special education case manager</td>
<td>No Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Black (Garifuna)</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>Public Charter ● Northeast ● 12th grade English language arts and special education</td>
<td>Public Charter ● Northeast ● 9-12th grade interventionist special education case manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omi</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>Public Charter ● Southeast ● K-1 math and science</td>
<td>No Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Race/Identity</td>
<td>Years</td>
<td>School Type</td>
<td>School Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Traditional Public</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6th grade social studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>Black (Biracial)</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>Public Charter</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6th grade social studies and science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jannell</td>
<td>Black (African American)</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Public Charter</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9-12th grade English language arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mo</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>Public Charter</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection Method**

Data collection for this present study was guided by the methodological recommendations of narrative inquiry researchers Czarniawska (2004) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Multiple sources of data were used to describe school contexts and participant experiences. Participants completed demographic surveys, written narratives, and three rounds of semi-structured interviews spanning April to October 2021. These sources were used to answer the research questions, triangulate data, and enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Decrop, 1999). I also collected field texts to gain insight regarding participants’ schools; these field texts provided contextual information of participants’ experiences and not to confirm or disconfirm participant narratives. This next section describes in detail the content of said surveys, interviews, and field texts that were in data collection.
Surveys

Each participant completed a demographic survey (see item B in the appendix), which solicited background information such as gender, age, race and ethnicity, languages spoken, employment status, geographic location, highest level of education and employment history, and certification status (meaning if the participant is certified to teach or not). This information provided context regarding each of the participants’ personal and professional backgrounds. Additionally, this information provided relevant background that I took into consideration during the interviewing and data analysis. For example, one participant was feeling largely unsupported in her efforts to teach a subject that she was not certified in. Understanding the nature of her certification status gave me insight about this aspect of her professional experiences and her pedagogical decisions. The demographic survey also included three short answer questions:

1. What does it mean for you- personally and professionally- to be a teacher?

2. What expectations do you have of yourself as a classroom teacher? How does that influence how you interact with students and staff?

3. Tell a story about a time, event, or interaction that characterizes your experience as a woman of color at your job. For you, why was this event significant?

In some cases, participant responses to these short answer questions informed the direction of their interview. For example, one participant shared a comment that one of her students made about a lesson. I inquired about this event during an interview and gained additional information that I would have not otherwise received about affirming messages that teacher had received about her relationships with students. Altogether, the
demographic survey lent itself to understanding some of the contextual factors shaping each participant’s story.

Use of Multiple Interviews

Each participant completed three rounds of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were selected to solicit participants’ experiences to predetermined topics linked to research questions and gaps in teacher diversity literature. Semi-structured interviews also allow for research flexibility to pivot when interested and related topics surface in conversation. An additional benefit is that semi-structured interviews allow for consistency in discussing the same topics across interviews. Interviews spanned 60 minutes to 2 ½ hours each and were both facilitated and recorded via Zoom. All participants received a stipend in the form of a gift card upon completion of the third interview as a token of appreciation for their time and labor.

The first round of interviews was conducted from April to May 2021, the second round of interviews was held June to July 2021, and the final round from August to October 2021. I carefully scheduled the interviews to ensure a three to four-week interval between each participant’s interview and the follow up. Although modified to answer the research questions for this study, the interview protocols were based on prior protocols that were field tested in pilot studies accomplished Fall 2019, Spring 2020, and Summer 2020. Upon completion of each interview, I used the Voice Memo functionality on my cell phone to write reflective memos about my conversation with each participant. After each round of interviews, I created interview transcripts using Trint, an online automated transcription service. I then listened to the audio recording and accomplished a round of
structural edits to ensure transcriptions were verbatim. Reviewing each transcript also informed the direction of the next interview; I often took notes of additional topics to discuss with each participant in addition to the scripted questions. This next section describes the content of each interview and sample questions. Interview protocols are also included in the appendix.

**Participant Interviews: Round One**

The first interview focused on participant entry to teaching as well as school structural and organizational conditions. For example, I posed questions about school leadership and management structures, school decision-making, staff culture, teacher autonomy, and professional development. Below is a brief excerpt of sample topics and questions posed in the first round of interviews:

- **Personal/Professional History**
  - *Let's start with your background. Tell me a little bit about yourself.*
    - *Follow up: How do you identify in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, etc.?*

- **Entry to Teaching**
  - *Tell me the story about how you decided to become a teacher?*
    - *Follow up: How did you come to teach in [urban area]?*
  - *What parts of teaching do you like?*
  - *What aspects of teaching do you think need improvement?*

- **School Structural Conditions**
  - *What brought you to teaching at [insert school name]?
What are your main duties in your current position at this school?

What does it mean to be successful in your current position at this school?

School Organizational Conditions

To what extent do teachers at [insert school name] have influence on influencing school-wide policies and decisions?

How do you describe culture and relationships between staff members at [insert school name]?

These questions prompted participants to provide insight as to their decisions for teaching as well as working in urban schools. In addition, questions focused on structural and organizational questions, providing insight as to the participants’ lived experiences and standpoint regarding school policies. Appendix B includes this interview protocol in its totality.

Participant Interviews: Round Two

The second interview focused on how participants made meaning of their ethnic, racial, and gender identities. I posed questions as to how these identities shaped their personal and professional lives and the ways in which it influenced their interactions with school staff, students, and their families. Questions were also posed about messaging they received in the home as children about their ethnic, racial, and gender identities and the ways in which this meaning has changed over time. Below is an excerpt of the topics and questions posed in the first round of interviews:

Ethno-Racial, and Gender Identities
What does it mean for you to be [insert participant self-assigned term]?

- Ethno-Racial and Gender Identity in the Teaching Profession
  - How does being a Black woman inform your experience as a teacher?
    - Follow up: How does [insert ethno-racial and gender identities] inform your experiences with students in the classroom?

- Ethno-Racial and Gender Identity in the Workplace
  - What has your experience been like as a Black woman teacher in [insert school name]?
    - Follow up: Has [insert ethno-racial and gender identities] ever come up with colleagues?
    - Follow up: Has [insert ethno-racial and gender identities] ever come up with leadership?

These questions prompted participants to elaborate on the interaction between their socially constructed identities, professional experiences, and decision-making in the workplace. See appendix C for the complete interview protocol.

Participant Interviews: Round Three

The third interview included questions about participant identity negotiation and their intentions to leave or remain at their school. Below are some sample questions from interview protocol three:
● Identity Negotiation

○ There are many stereotypes and misconceptions in the media and in everyday life about [insert participant self-assigned terms]. To what extent do you see these stereotypes and misconceptions affecting you in the workplace?

○ Have you ever adjusted your language or mannerisms to fit in or accommodate others at work? If so, tell me a story the last time this happened.

  ▪ Follow up: How does it feel to alter your language or behavior to fit in at work? What emotions come to mind?

  ▪ Follow up: Are there positive aspects or benefits to altering your language and behavior? Please explain.

  ▪ Follow up: Are there negative aspects or costs to altering your language and behavior? Please explain.

● Decision-Making: School Mobility

○ Have you ever considered leaving your role as [insert position]?

○ Can you describe what influenced your decision to [stay/leave]?

○ Have you ever had a negative experience related to ethnicity, race, or gender that interfered with your ability to do your job effectively?

○ Follow up: Have you ever considered leaving your job due to a negative experience related to ethnicity, race, or gender?

○ What factors influence your decision to [stay/leave]?

● Decision-Making: Teacher Attrition & Turnover
- Have you ever considered leaving the profession?
- Can you take me through the factors that influence your decision?

Whereas the first two interviews focused more on participants’ professional experiences, this interview explored to what extent ethno-race, and gender identities shaped their employment decisions, if at all. The complete interview protocol is included in Appendix D.

Data Analysis

I used Miles and Huberman’s (1994) data analysis spiral to interpret the research findings. After each interview, the data were transcribed and coded using a systematic process.

Following each round of interviews, I first reviewed the transcripts line-by-line in Trint order to “immerse [myself] in the details and get a sense of the [data] as a whole before breaking it into parts” (Agar, 1980, p. 103). Upon finalizing the transcripts from the final round of interviews, I moved all the transcripts from Trint to Dedoose. To maintain security, I closed my Trint account so that the data would not be compromised. I then re-read each of the transcripts and use the ‘memo’ functionality of Dedoose to record reactions, questions, note similarities and differences, use of language, and contradictions within and across transcripts. I define memoing as “not just descriptive summaries of data but attempts to synthesize them into higher level analytic meanings” (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014, p. 95).

Next, I uploaded the transcripts to a new project in Dedoose and began two rounds of coding to answer research questions #1 and #2. The first round consisted of open coding. The second round of coding was informed by focused codes drawn from the
initial analysis. Upon completing these two rounds of coding, I generated themes in a Microsoft Word document that represented the findings from the study. I debriefed themes with my dissertation chair at least 3 times and engaged in a round of peer review with my dissertation accountability group.

In writing up the themes, I called upon *restorying*, which calls upon the analysis and re-organization of participant narratives for the purpose of dissemination (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Riessman, 2008). I did this by contextualizing participants’ narratives within the broader schema of teacher diversity literature. Table 2 lists the data collection, analysis procedures, and validation strategies in their entirety:

**Table 2: Data Collection, Analysis Procedures and Validation Strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Validation Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>How do self-identified Black women teachers explain ethno-racial and gender identities as factors influencing their pedagogical decisions?</em></td>
<td>1. Demographic surveys</td>
<td>1. <em>Triangulation</em> (only applied to demographic surveys and teacher interviews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Open-ended responses</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Teacher interviews</td>
<td>2. Thick description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analysis Procedures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Theory triangulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>How do the ethno-racial and gender identities of self-identified Black women influence workplace interactions and relationships with colleagues and school leaders?</em></td>
<td>1. Organize the survey and interview data in chronological order in Dedoose and by participant</td>
<td>4. Debriefing with dissertation chair at least three times and peer review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Transcribe the interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Read interview data line-by-line and memo using Dedoose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Implement open coding followed by focused coding to determine themes within and across participant narratives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Organize themes across each round of interviews for participants and <em>restory</em> by situating findings within larger scope of teacher diversity scholarship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>How do ethno-racial and gender identities influence how Black women teachers negotiate their identities to adapt to working conditions in urban schools?</em></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Validation Strategies: Pursuing Credibility and Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness and validity may be attained in qualitative research through a combination of strategies (Guion et al, 2011). Application of such strategies lend to credibility of the results (Denzin, 2012). For these purposes, four strategies were utilized: 1) data triangulation- I collected and analyzed data from surveys, written responses to open-ended questions, and interview data, 2) thick description- throughout analysis and writing, I intentionally centered participant voices and experiences, 3) theory triangulation- this study was guided by two theoretical frameworks from different disciplines to interpret same data, 4) debriefing with chair and peer review- I shared initial findings with my dissertation chair on three occasions as well as two scholars of different disciplines to generate additional reflection about study results, and 5) clarify researcher bias- I engaged in journaling and reflection throughout data collection to interrogate internalized biases and errant assumptions about participants’ experiences in relation to my own.

Conclusion

In summary, a narrative inquiry study was conducted to examine three research questions. These are:

1. *How do self-identified Black women teachers explain ethno-racial and gender identities as factors influencing their pedagogical decisions?*
2. *How do the ethno-racial and gender identities of self-identified Black women influence workplace interactions and relationships with colleagues and school leaders?*

3. *How do ethno-racial and gender identities influence how Black women teachers negotiate their identities to adapt to working conditions in urban schools?*

Multiple sources of data were collected and analyzed using multiple rounds of coding to explore the ways in which intersectionality and identity negotiation factored into how Black women teachers used storytelling to explain factors shaping their decision-making and aspects of their professional experiences.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore how dimensions of identity influence aspects of Black women's pedagogy, professional experiences, and decision-making as classroom teachers. In addition, this study investigated how Black women negotiate the intersections of their identities amidst interpersonal interactions and school working conditions. This study fills a void in research about teachers of color through a contextual analysis of intersectionality and identity negotiation among self-identified Black women teachers of the African diaspora. I argue this contextual analysis on intersectionality is valuable to the research base through its exploration of rich heterogeneity among teachers of color, and by extension, Black women teachers. Moreover, this present study challenges the monolithic assumptions about racial identity by focusing on how overlapping identities (e.g., ethnicity and race) shape how teachers of color make meaning of themselves and their school environment. This focus on intersectionality complicates our understanding of school workplace ecology by interrogating how individuals of diverse social locations may interact differently with overlapping systems of power (Collins, 1990). This research also lends itself to understanding how gendered and racial socialization influences the experiences of teachers of color and in some instances, sheds insight to factors that lead to
disproportionate turnover (Ingersoll et al., 2017). To this end, three questions guided the design and implementation of this research:

1. *How do self-identified Black women teachers explain ethno-racial and gender identities as factors influencing their pedagogical decisions?*

2. *How do the ethno-racial and gender identities of self-identified Black women influence workplace interactions and relationships with colleagues and school leaders?*

3. *How do ethno-racial and gender identities influence how Black women teachers negotiate their identities to adapt to working conditions in urban schools?*

Regarding the organization of this chapter, First, an overview of participants and their profiles are discussed. Profiles include information shared by participants in the demographic survey and in the interviews. Second, I share the thematic findings revealed by analysis of the data.

**Participant Profiles**

This narrative inquiry involved the participation of eight self-identified Black women of the African diaspora who work as classroom teachers in urban schools. In addition to providing context for their professional backgrounds, these profiles reveal insight as to how participants made meaning of their ethno-racial and gender identities and explained these as factors shaping their individual standpoints. Understanding how participants conceptualized their overlapping identities is central to contextualizing their narratives about their pedagogy, professional experiences, decision-making, and how they negotiated these identities in the workplace. Understanding that ethno-raciality and
gender are situated among and shaped by other identities, these profiles include additional information such as education, age, sexuality, and parent education level to understand participants’ social location. Although organized to convey participant meaning-making regarding Black womanhood, these descriptions do not intend to minimize the significance of these ethno-racial and gender identities as fluid, ever-evolving, and overlapping social constructs. To maintain confidentiality, I reference participants by their self-selected pseudonym.

**Camile**

Camile was a 9th grade African American History teacher in a public charter high school serving predominantly Black students in a Northeast urban area. She entered education through an alternative certification program and has been teaching in the same school for over 10 years. Camile comes from a middle-income family; her parents have college degrees, and she was raised in a predominantly white and affluent suburb outside of a Northeastern metropolitan area. In terms of educational attainment, Camile has a master’s degree in education and at the time of data collection, was in her final year of law school.

Camile described her ethno-racial identity in terms of being “the child of Guyanese and Ghanaian immigrants”. Specifically, her father had migrated from Ghana as a child and her mother was Guyanese by way of Canada. Camile expressed feeling disconnected from aspects of her ethnic roots in terms of language and customs. Although her father knew Twi, her mother was unfamiliar with the language, and it was not spoken at home. Though Camile was familiar with some Ghanaian and Guyanese
cuisine these were not cooked in the home, nor did she learn how to prepare them.
Camile also has not visited her parents’ countries of origin as her mother did not allow her father to take her to Ghana nor did her mother allow Camile to travel to Guyana. Despite disconnects with her ethnic background, Camile described extended visits with her Ghanaian grandmother who spoke Twi, cooked ethnic cuisine, and attended a Ghanaian church as formative in shaping her sense-making of Ghanaian culture. As a child, Camile also sensed a gap between her and other Black children due to her immigrant parents’ emphasis on assimilation to attain the American Dream. She said, “So growing up, I was [attempting to] figure out how to be Black in this middle space of I'm not Guyanese enough, I'm not Ghanaian enough, but I'm also not Black enough.” As such, she conveyed a sense of estrangement from other members of her ethno-racial groups due to lack of shared traits and lived experiences. She even conveyed that at moments during her K-12 education, she longed to be white to fit in with her mostly white peers.

When asked about what it meant to her to be a Black woman, Camile described her Blackness and womanhood as mutually reinforcing and undergirding her worldview. In particular, she described that her mother played a formative role in her understanding of womanhood and how she perceived their overlapping subordinate identities as Black women had advantages and disadvantages. Leading by example by pursuing multiple advanced degrees, Camile's mother emphasized a hard work ethic to circumvent the inevitable double discrimination she perceived her daughter would experience. In fact, she discouraged Camile from being an educator because she perceived it was not a respected field and that pursuing law or medicine would better suit Camile to navigate
racism or sexism in the job economy. In addition to a close relationship with her mother, Camile spoke fondly of her relationships with other Black women as a source of mutual support in her personal and professional life.

Regarding her entry into teaching, Camile entered college intending to pursue law school. However, she decided to pivot to education and delay applying to law school after receiving low test scores for law school entry. Camile entered TFA and was placed in a public charter school in a low-income community. Camile described that she had preconceived notions about working in a predominantly Black school; she hoped that shared racial identity with her students would lessen the challenges of working in a Title 1 school but quickly realized differences in social location created disconnects in the classroom. She said:

Before I started [teaching], I remember thinking that I would be fine. After all, I'm Black, they are Black. We will relate! But, I got into the classroom, and they handed me my butt. and I [quickly realized] we're not the same. I needed to learn from that and humble myself so I could figure out how I could teach them…Even though [my students and I] look the same, we don't operate the same. Our experiences aren’t the same.

_Beyoncé_

Beyoncé was a 9th-12th grade case manager and interventionist at an accelerated school for over-age and under-credited students in the Northeast region of the United States. Located in a predominantly Latino neighborhood, Beyoncé describes her students as equally Black and Latino. Regarding her background, Beyoncé grew up in a tight-knit, predominantly upper-middle-class Black community and described how many of her closest relationships were with other Nigerian and Nigerian American children. Likewise, Beyoncé described herself as a “Nigerian Black cis[gender] woman”. Her parents
immigrated from Nigeria before her birth. Regarding educational attainment, both her parents achieved the equivalent of a high school diploma in Nigeria before they arrived in the United States. Beyoncé conveyed that her Nigerian heritage shaped her standpoint in profound ways. First, she said, “Being Nigerian for me means that I just see things differently.” For instance, she described that her exposure to her parents’ tribal language as well as Yoruba culture and traditions equipped her to resist the deficit narratives about Africa that she believes are pervasive in Western society. As a child, Beyoncé also heard messages in the home that “Nigerian was good, Black American was bad.” Rachael described that she pushed back on these notions about Black Americans from a young age because she perceived that the African diaspora benefitted from the efforts of Black American civil rights activists.

While Beyoncé celebrated the uniqueness of her background and diaspora unity, she also believed that racialization negatively influenced her lived experiences as a Black woman. She said:

[I am] affected by systems and institutions that are created to oppress and discourage me from getting or receiving what my white counterparts have, and these systems and institutions are so automatic that even if the people in power left, they would still succeed to do what they were created to do. So that means that I have to do twice as much. That means that I have to present in a way that counters these systems and institutions. That means that I have to teach differently. That means that I have to interact with my students differently.

In this excerpt, Beyoncé connects her own experiences of racialized marginalization to how “systems and institutions” influence her work with Black and Latino students.

Although Beyoncé’s initial career aspiration did not include teaching, she described that Black educators were formative in her educational experiences. In fact, Beyoncé shared that she was exposed to “Black excellence” from a young age and that
many of her K-12 teachers were Black. Upon completing her undergraduate degree in
STEM, she worked in the medical field. However, she quickly changed her career
because she did not enjoy the hospital setting. She then decided to utilize her content
knowledge in math and science to pursue a career in education. She said:

I remember thinking to myself that I'm really strong in math and sciences. At least
let me at least teach kids that look like me. And then in the meantime, I'll give it
to whenever I decide to stop. But, I ended up really falling in love with it and
being good at it.

Omi

Omi was an early elementary Math and Science educator at an African-centered
public charter school serving primarily Black children in a Title 1 urban district in the
South. Raised by two college-educated professionals, Omi grew up in a nearby suburban
community where she works now. Unprompted, Omi brought up in the first interview
that she is “proud [to be Black] and very culturally biased.” She sees her racial and ethnic
identities as synonymous. She described how she makes meaning of being Black in the
second interview:

[To be Black is] to not second guess things that are innate to being Black. For
example, why I shouldn't talk like this or I probably shouldn't wear my hair like
this. I probably shouldn't wear that kind of shirt or that kind of print or cloth…I
think that's kind of being proud. I'm not really concerned about what people are
saying or thinking, this is who I am and what I've chosen to do or look like or
speak.

When asked about what messages she received from a young age about being a
Black woman, she shared experiences with colorism. As a dark-skinned child and the
darkest in her extended family, Omi recalled her mother being concerned about Omi
spending too much time in the sun. While her father never conveyed these messages, she
does not recall him calling her “beautiful” or “pretty”. Omi shared that her dark skin was her most noticeable trait, and by extension, she perceived that her “Blackness comes first”. Additionally, Omi perceived her gender was integrated with her racial identity. She felt a sense of empowerment in her identity as a Black woman but also a sense of vulnerability due to an experience with sexual assault at a young age. Following this event, she expressed that she is often guarded around mixed-gender company regardless of racial background.

Omi shared that she desired to become a teacher from a young age. She alludes to positively early education experiences with Black women teachers and family members as factors shaping her desire to be a teacher. She said:

My interest in teaching came half from my grandmother. She taught for almost 40 years, even went into slight dementia, and still was trying to drive to her school to substitute. My great aunt on the same side was a teacher. The [influence] is my second-grade teacher. I’m still in touch with her. She was a huge influence as far as me choosing this profession as well because I guess she made me feel just so amazing like I was the only child there was in the world. Something in me wanted to make another child feel the same way.

Omi decided to pursue educational studies as an undergraduate degree and worked as an early childhood educator before accepting her current job at the African-centered school.

Ana

At the time of the first interview, Ana was working as a 12th grade English Language Arts and special education teacher at a special admission charter school in a Northeastern city. She was born in the same city and raised by her grandmother and mother, both of whom were immigrants from Honduras. Likewise, Ana self-identified as “Garifuna by way of Honduras”. The Garifuna are the afro-indigenous descendants of the
Arawak-Caribs and West African peoples who were invited into their communities (Thorne, 2004). The Garifuna language, which Ana speaks in addition to English and Spanish, is a derivative of Arawakan. As the daughter of immigrants and a second-generation American, Ana found it hard to reconcile her family’s emphasis on *Latinidad* with being a Black woman in America. She said:

[To be Black and to be Honduran] is to have your feet in different places: one foot here in America and one in your culture. What Black means in America is not what Black means in my mom's homeland. For me, it’s about bridging that gap and figuring out how I can make or create this identity that sort of fuses both parts. I look at it like this: when I am here in America as a Black woman, what does that mean? And then when I go there [Honduras] as a Black woman, what does that mean? It doesn't necessarily have to intersect, but it doesn't necessarily have to be divided either. It's just about finding both in each place versus having one foot here and one foot over there.

Like Beyoncé, Ana described that her family also conveyed messages in the home about their ethnic identities and national origins and how it was perceived to be different than being Black in America. She shared a story to emphasize this point:

I remember one time, a family member said something to me along the lines of “Don't mess around with those like Black boys.” I was confused because they're Black, but we’re Black too. So, what's the difference between that Black and this Black? No one ever really explained that to me.

Ana described that her family’s cultural interpretations of womanhood were largely shaped by their national origins and ethnic heritage. When asked what messages she received as a child about what it meant to be a Black woman, she described that her mother and grandmother often emphasized the significance of wifedom, motherhood, and her preparation to be the future matriarch of their family. Though she spoke fondly of her aspirations to get married and start a family, she grappled with how she had been socialized to think of gender roles in marriage as well as the arbitrary limitations that her family imposed on her as a single woman (e.g., waiting until marriage to buy a home).
Despite their disapproval, she recently purchased a home and perceived this as an opportunity to build generational wealth for her future family.

Ana conveyed that her early educational experiences also shaped her sense-making as a multilingual Afro-Latina who spoke Spanish, English, and the Garifuna language. As a child who was segregated from her peers and placed in English language learning classes, Ana described very few interactions with other Black children and experienced instances of micro-aggressions from light-skinned Latinas. She described that she was still in the process of reconciling her Afrodescendencia and Latinidad as a self-identified Black woman, but had come to the following understanding:

I think now that Black is beautiful, but it's also complex… It just so happened that my ancestors landed in Honduras because the ancestors could have also landed in Guatemala or Belize or St. Vincent, right? Because that's the history of the Garifuna people, right? We landed in so many places. I just happened to speak Spanish. I very well could have spoken French or whatever, and I would still be Black. And so that's where I'm at now, where I can say I can claim it and I'm proud of it.

Like Camile and Beyoncé, Ana’s career aspirations did not initially include education or teaching. However, a brief internship at an afterschool program influenced her to enter TFA upon completing her bachelor’s degree. Motivated by a desire to work with students from immigrant backgrounds in her community, she returned to her hometown. She spent two years working in an alternative school that her brothers had also attended before her employment. When the school announced its closure, she applied for a job at the dual language charter school. Ana described that the school’s mission was to provide Spanish-speaking and immigrant students access to quality education resonated with her, particularly because of her own experiences as an English Language Learner. She said, “Now this is a place where I must use both of my languages constantly, consistently, and
that helps in the success of my kids.” Ana worked at this school at the time of the first interview but then moved to a different state between the 2nd and 3rd interviews where she accepted employment at a 7-12 public charter school that served primarily Black students.

Annie

At the time of the interviews, Annie was a social studies teacher in a 9-12th grade traditional public school in a Title 1 urban district in the Northeast. The racial demographic of the student population mirrors the surrounding majority Black community. Annie described herself as wearing “lots of hats” in her personal and professional life. In addition to teaching, she served as enrollment coordinator and grade team lead. She also was a mother to two young children and engaged to be married. Raised by a single mother who recently retired from nursing, Annie decided to become a teacher from a young age despite her mother’s insistence that teaching was an undervalued and underpaid profession. However, Annie perceived education as her calling and aspired to be a school administrator.

Annie self-identified as a Black woman. She used the term, ‘Black’, and not ‘African American’, explaining:

I identify as Black because… I can’t pinpoint where I was from. I can’t necessarily say African American, even though clearly I’m a descendant of African slaves that came here. I liken myself to the cultural aspect of being Black. So, Black doesn't necessarily equate to being African American. You could be Jamaican or Cuban even though you look Black. I feel like Black is more than just a race and ethnicity; Black is a culture.

When asked about what messages she received growing up about being a Black woman,
Annie shared:

I was always taught as a Black woman, you'll have to do this and you must do that. It was more so like that ‘strong Black woman’ kind of upbringing. I hate that. I hate the idea of being a strong Black woman. It assumes that your only role is to be oppressed, to be a burden, and to have too much on your plate. It was kind of like I was being prepped for, especially coming from a single parent home where I saw a Black woman doing so many things and she's working to the bone to provide for me and my family… the identity of a Black woman having to do everything was just a normal thing for me.

Despite being a busy mom and teacher with extra responsibilities on top of a full teaching load, Annie rejects this racial and gendered trope and re-defined Black womanhood for herself. She said:

[Being a Black woman] is constantly evolving. So today, I am a proud Black woman. Tomorrow, I might be a tired Black woman. The next day I might be overwhelmed. You know, I'm just constantly ebbing and flowing. My definition is constantly changing as I evolve as a woman, as an adult, as I'm learning more about myself, and I'm constantly learning more about myself and reflecting. But at this point, being a Black woman means to be aware and be conscious of who you are and not. Not backing down from your identity to make somebody else feel comfortable.

As stated earlier in this section, Annie decided as a child to enter teaching. This decision was influenced in part by her own experience as a student in a Title 1 public school district outside of the metropolitan area where she now works. Reflecting on the impact of disparate funding on her academic preparedness, Annie said, “I decided to become a part of the system and dismantle the system from the inside by becoming an educator.” Annie was also drawn to teaching because “I did not want people who looked like me to get the same education that I got.” Upon graduation from a teacher preparation program, Annie began her tenure at the public school where she continued to work during data collection.
Jay was a middle school social studies teacher at a public charter school serving predominantly Black students and a small population of non-Black students in the city center of a Northeast urban hub. She is one of two participants in this study who stayed at their school but changed their positions during data collection. She ended the 2020-2021 school year as a 6th grade African American History and science teacher. At the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year, she agreed to teach 7th grade Ancient World History because the 6th grade position was dissolved. Jay also held a master’s degree in education.

Jay self-identified as a biracial Black woman but “… to get to that conclusion took [her] awhile.” She was raised by her white mother and paternal grandparents in a predominantly Irish and Polish neighborhood in the same city where she taught at the time of the interviews. She described that as a child, she had little opportunity to establish a positive racial identity as a Black biracial child. She also mentioned that her maternal family did not support her efforts, because they insisted “she [was] white too.” Jay did not have a relationship with her father or her paternal family; moreover, she had few interactions with other Black students in her early educational years because she attended a predominantly white Catholic school. It wasn’t until Jay attended a racially diverse middle school and experienced a series of racialized encounters with authority figures that she began to make meaning of her identity as a Black woman. Jay conveyed that she has come to identify as Black because she has been racialized in these prior experiences as Black. She described that she previously perceived her ethno-racial and gender identity
as a Black woman to have negative connotations because of implied messaging and negative interactions with family members, educators, and authority figures. However, in recent years, she had come to understand that "to be a Black woman [meant] strength, resilience, determination, and passion… passion about what you do and passionate about being Black." Jay also attributed her romantic partnership as a pivotal factor that helped her embrace her identity as a Black woman. Although she had been in relationships previously with Black men, she felt like her current partner affirmed the totality of her ethnic-racial and gender identities. She said:

The journey of trying to figure [what it means to be Black] out has been a long road… He was the one that really taught me what it meant to be Black and what Black beauty was. I'm getting a little emotional thinking about it, but yes, he is the one that truly showed me and made me appreciate and accept myself as a Black woman.

As a Black biracial woman with Polish and Italian roots, Jay participated in several Eastern European cultural practices, including holidays, culinary traditions, and usage of terms of endearment for her grandparents. Jay celebrated these aspects of her ethnic heritage identity and did not see it in conflict with the enactment of her racial identity although she said "being Black outweighed everything else."

Jay described that the trauma she sustained as a child shaped her decision-making to become a teacher. Having experienced housing instability and neglect, Jay took on adult responsibilities from a young age. These responsibilities included supervising and tutoring her younger siblings, which sparked her interest in teaching. Upon graduating from her teacher preparation program, she accepted employment at a K-8 public charter school where she was employed at the time of the study.
Jannell was a certified high school social studies educator employed at an all-boys urban public charter school located in the Northeast region of the United States. The school and its surrounding community are majority Black. Like Jay, she changed positions during data collection. First, she was employed as an English Language Arts teacher in the 2020-2021 school year. Although not initially issued a contract to return the following year, Jannell was offered a position over the Summer to join the history department at the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year. Before this school, she worked at another urban high school, but her contract was not renewed, which shaped her decision-making to accept employment at her current school. Jannell is not from the city; she was raised by college-educated parents in a majority-white suburban community in the Northeast.

When asked to describe her ethno-racial and gender identities, Janell described herself as “an African American woman.” She stated, “I guess I would fall under Black, just like not knowing my heritage.” Like Annie and Omi, Jannell explains her identity as a member of the Black community as a cultural identity. She said,

I think Black implicitly implies that you are like ‘who knows?’ descent…It’s like we created our own culture. We are this between this ‘I don't know who I am’ but I know that whoever from whatever plantation came together to create the culture that has been passed down to me.

Jannell described childhood messaging from family members and college experiences as pivotal in influencing her sense-making about her ethno-racial and gender identities. Like Camile, Jannell described that her mother often emphasized the importance of a hard
work ethic as a strategy to mitigate discrimination based on race and gender. At the time, Jannell agreed with her mother about the importance of working hard. However, she perceived that she had always been treated fairly in school and such a need to consider racism and sexism as factors influencing her social world was unnecessary. Jannell's standpoint shifted when she went to college; she lived in an affinity dorm with other students of color whom she described as social justice-oriented. Along with her peers, she described participating in campus protests to draw attention to issues of racial violence and police brutality. She also described experiencing racial and gender micro-aggressions as a pre-service teacher enrolled in a teacher education program, all of which profoundly influenced how she understood her identity as a Black woman. Presently, she described her ethno-racial and gender identities as “being a Black woman is like being a red dot in a sea of white dots.” She conveyed this sense of hyper-visibility occurs in her personal and professional life because she finds that she is often one of few- or the only- Black woman in these contexts.

Jannell started working in urban schools immediately after she graduated from college. She described her transition to working in urban schools as a shock. Like Camile, Jannell came to understand how she understood her own experiences as a Black woman were very different from the lived experiences of her students when she began teaching at a predominantly Black school. She says, “now being an adult and working in urban settings and working in these schools with predominantly Black kids… It's been hard at times for me to relate to my students and what their experiences are.”
Mo

Mo was an early education educator who works at a public charter school in the Northeast. Like Ana, she switched schools during data collection. At the conclusion of the 2020-2021 school year, she worked as a kindergarten teacher at a no-excuses charter serving predominantly Black students and a small population of Latino students in a low-income community. She decided not to renew her contract and transitioned to teach 1st grade at a public charter school in a predominantly Latino area. She was also an alumna of this school.

Mo described herself as unapologetically proud to be a Black woman. Like other participants in this study, she stated she identified as Black and not African American because she lacks connection with her “African bloodline and ancestors” due to chattel slavery. She states that to claim African American identity is to participate in a cultural experience that she doesn’t have. Instead, she stated, “I'm a Black American because I can speak to the Black experience; I cannot speak to the African experience. And I feel like it would kind of be a disservice if I did try so I don't.”

Unlike Jay and Omi who perceived their racial identities outweighed their other identities, Mo described that her gender identity was “special” to her and “always at the forefront.” She finds the ability to “form a [human] life” and give birth a “reason to celebrate women. She was impressed by the ability that she perceived women had to “speak life” and embody resilience “despite being constantly undermined” in a masculinist society. Although deeply impacted by the attributes that she associated with womanhood, Mo also acknowledged the existence of racial and gender stereotypes
accompanying conceptions of womanhood and Black womanhood. However, Mo resisted how these stereotypes might constrain how she performed her identity. She explained:

Black womanhood [to me] means strength. It means love. It means spreading that love. It also means allowing myself to be upset about things and to be angry and to be mad, even though I'm told, you know, as a woman and as a Black woman, you cannot be mad.

Mo described positive early childhood experiences in school that shaped her decision-making to become a teacher. Specifically, she explained her first-grade teacher, a Black woman with locs like her, influenced her decision-making to become a teacher. Despite her desire to teach at an early age, Mo chose to major in the health professions in college but soon changed her major. After college, Mo worked as a paraprofessional and substitute teacher. She was offered employment by the no-excuses public charter school and shortly thereafter, started a graduate program so that she could earn her teaching credentials. Mo was still employed at the no-excuses charter during the first interview but had already accepted employment at the second public charter where she would begin teaching the following school year.

Findings

The findings are organized into ten themes. Research question one asks: How do self-identified Black women teachers explain ethno-racial and gender as factors influencing their pedagogical decisions? Four themes emerged from that data, indicating that participants engaged in 1) supplementing curriculum with counter-narratives and role models, 2) facilitating conversations about race-related current events, 3) teaching the truth About American history, and 4) guiding students to navigate a racialized society. The second research question asks: How do the ethno-racial and gender identities of self-
identified Black women influence workplace interactions and relationships and colleagues and school leaders? The themes include: 5) experiencing micro-aggressions in interracial interactions, 6) disengaging from diversity initiatives, and 7) participating in supportive intra-racial relationships. Three themes emerged to answer the third research question: *How do ethno-racial and gender identities influence how Black women teachers negotiate their identities to adapt to working conditions in urban schools?*

Participants revealed identity negotiation for the purpose of 8) avoiding cultural stereotypes, 9) pursuing desired ends, and 10) redefining professionalism. These research questions and corresponding themes are outlined in Table 3:

**Table 3: Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Themes</th>
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<tr>
<td>RQ #1: <em>How do self-identified Black women teachers explain ethno-racial and gender identities as factors influencing their pedagogical decisions?</em></td>
<td>1. Supplementing curriculum with counter-narratives and role models</td>
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<td>2. Facilitating conversations about race-related current events</td>
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<td>3. Teaching the truth about American history</td>
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<td>4. Guiding students to navigate a racialized society</td>
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<td>RQ 2: <em>How do the ethno-racial and gender identities of self-identified Black women influence workplace interactions and relationships with colleagues and school leaders?</em></td>
<td>5. Experiencing micro-aggressions in interracial interactions</td>
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<td>6. Disengaging from diversity initiatives</td>
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<td>7. Participating in supportive intra-racial relationships</td>
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<td>RQ3: <em>How do ethno-racial and gender identities influence how Black women teachers negotiate their identities to adapt to working conditions in urban schools?</em></td>
<td>8. Avoiding gendered racial stereotypes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9. Pursuing desired ends</td>
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<td>10. Redefining professionalism</td>
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**RQ #1:** How do self-identified Black women teachers explain ethnicity, race, and gender as factors influencing their pedagogical decisions?

This present study reveals participants’ identities- as well as the overlap of shared identities and backgrounds with students- shaped their pedagogical decisions. The term, “pedagogy”, refers to the theory and process of learning while also considering the social context of learning with the learner’s psychological and cognitive development (Dunn et al., 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2021). Altogether, participants demonstrate four types of decisions related to their pedagogy.

**Theme #1: Supplementing Curriculum with Counter-Narratives and Role Models**

Participant narratives revealed they supplemented their school curricula to include counter-narratives and role models into classroom lessons that reflected their students’ backgrounds. Participants indicate that these decisions were influenced by their students’ ethno-racial identities as well as shaped by their own understanding of their identities.

Background information is required to understand the nature of curriculum in urban schools as well as the school-based factors that shape participants’ pedagogical decision-making. Prior studies indicate that standardized testing taken together with market-based reform initiatives influence the nature of curriculum in urban schools (Ravitch, 2016). Some perceive standardized testing as a tactic to provide access to common knowledge, detect achievement gaps, and improve quality of instruction by holding teachers accountable for student performance (Mulcahy & Irwin, 2008). Critics, however, consider standardized testing to limit the scope of curriculum to include tested
content, thus influencing teachers’ pedagogical decisions to develop lessons that align to the content of the test and exclude non-tested material even if there is not prescriptive curriculum in place (Wright et al., 2018; Robinson & Dervin, 2019). This is particularly relevant in school settings where student standardized achievement factors into teacher accountability systems (White, 2018). Of the eight participants, only one had a prescriptive curriculum that she was required to follow. However, each of the participants described they were held accountable for students’ performance on standardized tests and evaluated by classroom observations, value-added models, and student growth goals. Despite the constraints of testing and accountability measures for student performance, participants persisted to include non-tested material in their lessons to reflect students’ lived experiences, center their cultural backgrounds, and stimulate student agency.

Critical scholars of education suggest curriculum can be a tool to legitimize a Eurocentric status quo (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018). It can also uplift white supremacy and imply the inferiority of people of color through inaccurate or incomplete narratives. Curriculum is also indicative of property, with rights and representation being for a selective few while minoritized students’ experiences and backgrounds may be rendered invisible (Harris, 1993). Therefore, decision-making to supplement the curriculum is an act of resistance and inherently political.

Researchers have long examined the tradition of Black women's pedagogy as an extension of their political activism and resistance (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1993, 2002; Dixson, 2003; Dixson & Dingus, 2007). By supplementing the curriculum with counter-narratives and role models, Black women are resisting the inaccurate or incomplete depictions of their students, and by extension, themselves. This resistance is shaped by
women's lived experiences, aspirations, and interactions with intersecting systems of oppression. For instance, Beyoncé explained that her ethno-racial identity influenced her classroom pedagogy, like how it impacted every aspect of her life. She said, “I think being Black influences how I drive or what music I like… it also influences how I teach and what I teach.” She recalled specific instances when, as a STEM teacher in her former school, Beyoncé often supplemented the curriculum to reflect the backgrounds of the primarily Black students with whom she worked. She said:

I make it a point to have these conversations with them. They know about Black inventors. Science ain't just Thomas Jefferson! You know the super soaker? Black man! Your mom got surgery for her eye? Black woman! Stop playing with us. Every time you're on a bus or in a car and you see a traffic light? Black man! Don’t just think that all white people did this because that's all your books teach you.

This excerpt conveys Beyoncé’s decision making to supplement curriculum by highlighting Black role models and their accomplishments to disrupt implicit assumptions that only Europeans have made significant contributions in the science field. Her actions signify an act of resistance to center the experiences and agency of Black Americans that have otherwise been made invisible in her curriculum. Specifically, Beyoncé accomplishes this through counter-stories, a tenet of critical race theory to “question, mock, and displace comforting majoritarian tales and myths” (Delgado and Stefanic, 1998, p. 475).

Like Beyoncé, Mo supplemented the curriculum through counter-stories to resist and challenge her students’ assumptions and thinking about individuals from minoritized backgrounds. Her decision-making was birthed out of her pursuit of a healthy racial identity as a Black woman. Although she expressed pride in being a Black woman, Mo said, “There was a time I did not want to be black” due to childhood experiences of
classism, racism, and sexism compounded by peer pressure and physical abuse in the home. As a classroom teacher, Mo was inclined to convey positive portrayals of minoritized people through her pedagogy to support her students’ understanding of their own racial identities. For instance, she shared an in-the-moment decision that she made in response to a Black child’s reaction to dark skin, Mo said:

We were reading the book, *A Letter to Amy*, a few weeks ago and one of my students said “Eww, look at those dark people!” She was talking about the characters in the book. After she said it, she pointed to a dark-skinned child in the class and said “Eww, they look like [so and so]. This obviously hurt the child and me that she said this, so I stopped my lesson and read them a book called *Sulwe* by [Kenyan-Mexican author] Lupita Nyong’o. *Sulwe* is about a girl named Sulwe who does not like her beautiful midnight skin. She goes on a journey that lets her know all skin colors are beautiful, but hers is special (specifically the diversity within Black and Brown folk). After reading the book, the student who made the comment said that all the characters in that book were so beautiful. We talked about what we thought made them beautiful and I explained to her that just because someone was favored a little bit more by the sun doesn’t make them less than, ugly or unworthy.

Mo’s lesson that day did not include reading *Sulwe*. However, she adjusted her lesson in response to the offending student’s comment as well as to address the colorism that had just transpired in the classroom. Although it may have been appropriate to correct the student in a one-on-one interaction, Mo’s decision to read *Sulwe* was a strategic move to disrupt Eurocentric beauty standards that elevate light-skinned individuals over darker-skinned individuals and the ways in which this had been internalized by her students. Although only one student made the comment, Mo took the opportunity to create a teaching moment and impact her entire class of Black and Latino students. Black feminism provides an analytic tool to reframe Mo’s pedagogical decisions in two ways. First, Mo selects *Sulwe*, a book inspired by its author’s own journey of self-acceptance with her dark skin. Also, the book is illustrated by Vashti Harrison, a self-identified
Black woman whose art reflects the beauty and diversity of Black hair and skin (Landrigan & Johnson, 2021). In contrast, *A Letter to Amy* is the work of Ezra Jack Keats, a Polish-Jewish-American author and illustrator. Although Keats’ work was groundbreaking in its own right, Mo’s decision-making to select *Sulwe* provided students with a counter-narrative that de-centered the white gaze about beauty. The main character, Sulwe, can also be a potential aspirational figure—a literary role model—for Mo’s students as it describes one child’s journey to accept themselves and see themselves as beautiful. Second, Mo’s pedagogical decision to read *Sulwe* aloud to all students is significant. The book itself represents a critique of coloniality and the ways in which western standards of beauty have been internalized within the diaspora. Mo isn’t challenging her student but challenging the *ideas* to which all her students have been exposed. She rejects the devaluation of dark-skinned attributes as less desirable and fostering a collective consciousness among her students akin to the 1960’s era slogan, “Black is beautiful”. In fact, Jha (2015) writes that “The slogan ‘Black Is Beautiful’ carved out a space of black pride and cultural affirmation so that a new conception of beauty and consciousness could come into the American imagination” (p. 34). Indeed, Mo’s actions convey a political resistance to dominant cultural messaging.

Mo shared multiple stories in which she supplemented the curriculum with counter-stories and role models of minoritized peoples. In fact, she explained that her decision-making to select counter-stories and role models was shaped by the ethno-racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the students she served. She emphasized positive qualities about the African diaspora in her pedagogy but also included counter-stories and role models of other backgrounds. For example, she discussed designing a read aloud
about Sonia Sotomayor, the first *Latina* associate justice of the United States supreme court. Mo also shared that on occasion, she read aloud books in Spanish so that her English Language Learners felt represented in the classroom, which created a pathway for her non-Spanish speaking students to learn and use simple Spanish phrases with their peers. She even incorporated religious diversity in the classroom by supplementing her school’s scripted curriculum with the text, *Mommy’s Khimar*. In her opinion, Mo’s focus on showcasing ethno-racial diversity improved how students perceived themselves and influenced the overall climate of the classroom. She said, “exposing them to different things about brown people really helped” to foster a sense of unity in the classroom.

Mo’s pedagogy might be characterized as culturally informed teaching methods. Culturally informed teaching methods are often associated in teacher diversity literature with teachers of color- and Black women teachers in particular- as tactics to incorporate minoritized students’ lived experiences into a curriculum where they are historically erased (Gardener et al., 2021) and foster a healthy racial identity (Ware, 2006). All the participants in this study critiqued the lack of relevance of school curriculum to their students’ ethno-racial backgrounds and everyday experiences. However, many participants only selected counter-stories and role models reflective of their Black students even when they admitted to teaching students of other ethno-racial backgrounds. Mo was the only teacher who demonstrated a sensitivity to multiple axes of identity when constructing classroom lessons. This discrepant data should be interpreted with caution because there may have been strategies that participants utilized that were not shared during interviews. However, Mo’s decision-making represents an ideological commitment to “counter-hegemonic knowledge” and “consciousness-raising” that is
consistent with the documented characteristics of Black women’s pedagogy (Alinia, 2015, p. 2335). This discrepant data may also substantiate a body of teacher diversity literature that argues that teachers of color require “systematic and explicit training in cultural responsiveness” to avoid assumed cultural competency (Cherry, 2019, p. 241)

Theme #2: Facilitating Conversations about Race-Related Current Events

2020 was significant in bringing the reality of overlapping social crises to the forefront of the American public imagination (Laurencin & Walker, 2020). Taken together, the social crises of hyper-visible police brutality, structural racism, economic downturn, and climate against the backdrop of a global pandemic caused many to question the very fabric of the American democratic experiment (Jones, 2021). Consistent with other bodies of literature, participants experienced a range of reactions to these events (Daub et al., 2021; Souto-Manning & Melvin, 2022). Participants conveyed that race-related events, such as the string of police killings of unarmed Black and Latino individuals and following sociopolitical unrest, triggered traumatic responses as well as amplified racial stress related to their own histories related to racism. When asked how these events shaped their work as self-identified Black women teachers, all but one participant described broaching conversations about race-related current events in the classroom. In this next section, I detail how participants conveyed facilitating conversations about such race-related current events with their students across high school, middle school, and elementary grade bands.
High School

In this study, seven of the eight participants created space for student voice and for students to bring in outside topics into the classroom. For example, when these events first gained traction in the media, Ana shared that she “experienced them as an educator first” and that her “first instinct was to read, learn, read, learn, read, learn, [and ask] how do we bring this into the classroom?” Admitting that she did not take time to grieve until later, Ana conveyed that her desire to read and learn so that she was equipped to “bring this dialogue into the classroom so that the kids can have this conversation.” When asked who initiated these conversations, Ana shared that her high school students often brought up these questions to her- despite their misalignment to the English Language Arts curriculum in her school. She said:

My kids are politically inclined, and so anything that happens, if we don't bring it up for whatever reason, they most definitely will. They know that it's a safe space to be able to have this conversation...no matter how small it is, it gets brought into the classroom. The classroom is a reflection of the real world.

As such, she anticipated her students’ desire to broach these topics and felt compelled to educate herself in advance. At times, she even prepared backup lesson plans to make space for students’ questions when such events transpired. Ana’s willingness to upend her lesson plans to facilitate a race-related conversation at her students’ behest is consistent with elements of Black women teachers’ pedagogy as affirming and valuing students’ agency (Ramsey, 2012).

Participants' pedagogical decision-making to facilitate conversations about race-related current events was situated within their own experiential knowledge regarding intersections of identity. This shows an acute awareness of their own embodied realities inside and outside the classroom. For instance, Beyoncé brought up police brutality
within the larger context of institutional racism and structural inequality. Regarding these topics, she utilized questioning to solicit their lived experiences. This is consistent with documented attributes of Black women’s pedagogy which acknowledge students' experiences are significant as a criterion for knowledge production (Collins, 1989; Joseph, 1988). Beyoncé described how this questioning may look in her classroom context. She said, “it typically starts with what does it mean to be black in America? What does it mean to be white? Right, and what does white privilege look like?” By posing such open-ended questions, Beyoncé is centering her students’ experiential knowledge and invoking a pluralist classroom where multiple ideas and perspectives are exchanged.

*Middle School*

Jay also facilitated conversations about race-related current events with her pre-adolescent middle school students. She said:

[My students] had a lot of opinions on those topics, and they wanted to talk about it, and they were happy to talk about it. [No matter] how sad and really depressing those topics were, they wanted to talk about it, and they really appreciated being able to have the opportunity to talk about it.

By the same token, Jay affirmed her students’ agency by centering their voices in these conversations. It was also important to her that all students were able to participate in these conversations regarding ethno-racial identity, gender, or other aspects of identity. Although Jay created space for her Black students to express their thoughts about challenging current events, she also corrected them when they expressed hateful and inaccurate generalizations towards white people. She explained this as “giving both perspectives”, which she believed was informed by her “upbringing being raised by white
people.” Additionally, she taught white students and perceived her biracial identity was suited to advocate for Black and white students alike. Additionally, she perceived her biracial identity lent itself to be a cultural bridge between her white and Black students to “get rid of those racial biases as well or prejudices”. She shared one example, which she characterized as her “best achievement”:

I remember when one [Black] student would say, “I hate white people! They are the absolute worst.” Then I got them to clarify to the point where they changed their language to “racist white people.” I told them that’s the key because not all white people are racist, right?

Jay drew on her embodied reality and observations as a biracial child in a white family to guide her facilitation of race-related current events. Shaped by her lived experiences as a self-identified biracial Black woman, Jay’s description of pedagogical decisions contribute to teacher diversity literature as this is an area that is underexplored.

*Elementary School*

Like many other participants in this study, early childhood educators Omi and Mo also engaged in class discussions with their students about police brutality and other race-related current events. Both described using age-appropriate strategies to explain the events as well as help students process their feelings. Despite the young age of their students, Omi and Mo found that students entered the classroom with some familiarity with racism. In fact, Omi and Mo described that their students conveyed an awareness of these topics, indicating that racism and discrimination were already embedded in their cultural reality. This is consistent with other bodies of research regarding racism and childhood experiences. For example, Tatum (1997) writes that children of color often recall interactions with racism at a notably younger age than white children. In fact,
participants' decision-making to facilitate race-related current events may advance our understanding of culturally informed methods of teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

Theorizing the hyper-visibility of police brutality because of cell phone recording and prevalence in the public discourse due to new media, images of policing and police brutality have become ingrained in our cultural framework. Once depicted to be found on Southern trees, ‘Strange Fruit’ can be encountered at the touch of a button. Likewise, Walley-Jean (2020) suggests that police brutality and Covid-19 are separate yet intersecting tragedies, both disproportionately impacting the Black population in America, and are forever etched in our national memory.

Regarding race-related current events, Omi defended her decision-making to discuss police brutality with her 1st grade students. She conveyed that she wasn’t exposing students to the realities of racism but rather giving them a space to make sense of the events that shaped their everyday lives. She said:

I don't even think it's the thing where I'm like bursting their bubble or it’s something that they never even realized. It’s happening every day. It is their brothers and cousins and neighbors [that] are the ones that are getting shot. Even the [students] that I teach, they're the ones dying from the police. My students often say, “We saw! We know! It was down the street, or we see it on the news, or we heard them rallying at the Wendy's, or we saw where they burned down this building.” So, I don't even think it's anything that I'm like throwing in their faces.

Like Omi, Mo shared that many of her five- and six-year-old students entered her classroom with knowledge of these events “because their parents told them the truth.” She mimicked the age-appropriate strategies she utilized to discuss the George Floyd murder and other instances of police brutality in her classroom. She said:

I wasn't super graphic, but a man was killed by police, and it was not warranted. Then I would explain what that meant. [The students] were like, “Well, but police are supposed to help us, right?” And I'm like, “Yes, and police will help you. If
you do need help, they will but sometimes they are scared, and they may do things out of fear.” I tried to explain in a way [that] when people are scared, they don't make the best decisions because they are afraid.

By portraying the police as “being scared”, Mo is using a feeling that many young children are familiar with to depict how tense interactions coupled with unequal power dynamics and implicit racial associations can lead to tragic outcomes.

Black feminist scholars have described aspects of Black women's pedagogy often reflect students’ sociopolitical and historical contexts and embed these into learning. While it is necessary for white teachers to acknowledge the impact of these events on their students of color (Alvarez et al., 2018; Love, 2018), teachers of color also require support in navigating these conversations. Many of the participants conveyed the hyper-visibility of police brutality and civil unrest during the Covid-19 pandemic had significant psychological, emotional, and physical effects on their overall wellbeing. These effects manifested in a range of coping strategies, including therapy, pets, and new hobbies. Camile even described "calling out Black” after a particularly difficult week. Many teachers described feeling unseen and unsupported by school leadership in engaging their racial stress and facilitation of race-related current events. The outlying teacher, Jannell, did not engage her students in conversation about race-related current events. Instead, her priority was managing her own mental health and the challenges of teaching online. As a teacher giving online instruction in an area outside her professional expertise, she simply did not have the bandwidth to plan these conversations. Ultimately, the need for technical support with conversation facilitation for teachers of color taken together with recognizing the effects of racial stress and workplace dynamics are important issues emerging from this finding.
Participant narratives shared that they often challenged cultural myths about American history in their courses. Teachers grounded their decision-making as a tactic to reveal the truth of American history and resist lies. This occurred against the backdrop of public discourse and political debates over Critical Race Theory and inaccurate claims of socializing students with unpatriotic ideals.

As self-identified Black women of the African diaspora and classroom teachers of ethno-racially minoritized students, they felt compelled to correct cultural myths about the American origin story, structural racism, and inaccurate representations regarding communities of color.

For example, Omi, a math and science teacher, challenged cultural myths of American history in her classroom. She explained that she had a co-teacher and, during their social studies block, often interjected commentary to supplement or correct aspects of the school curriculum and how it was presented to students. She stated, “I just don't teach the lies. I can't. I just can't do it because I feel like it's a disservice [to students].”

When asked how her stance might influence her approach to teaching, she said:

If anything, I might not teach anything or find a way around like whatever lessons … but I’m damn sure not teaching about Christopher Columbus and nobody saving us and starting at slavery as far as those lessons goes.

In addition to eliminating dominant narratives about American history, Omi indicated that she found it important to foreground erased histories of communities of color that were asset-based. She felt a deep conviction to share these erased histories with her students, saying, “I'm telling you what's real. I'm telling you about the richest person that ever was- Mansa Musa.” Though she cites a person relevant to global history, these
excerpts indicate the push and pull to interrogate inaccuracies and replace these with historical narratives often left out of the curriculum.

Ana also challenged cultural myths of American history through an examination of power, representation, and storytelling. While Omi disregarded teaching about Christopher Columbus, Ana “taught the standard curriculum” but with intentionality. Although an English Language Arts teacher, her curriculum included non-fiction so there were times to incorporate historical topics into her classroom. She said, “We are talking about Christopher Columbus, but there were also so many other people that came to discover and explore.” Ana challenged her students to interrogate whose stories were being told, why they were being told, why other histories were left out, and “what are the effects of those things.” While she understood professional expectations around implementing the curriculum, she sought to “maintain that balance between what I need to teach and something they should know.”

In her role as a social studies teacher, Annie was passionate about not “sugarcoat[ing] the history that [students] are going to get in my class.” Like Omi and Ana, Annie was committed to correcting the historical record and amplifying topics that were omitted from her history curriculum, even if they were challenging. Annie’s decision-making was also rooted in facilitating students’ ability to make connections between past and present events. For example, she shared:

A lot of our conversations had to do with the mental health of seeing people being brutally murdered on TV in 2021 and how the same thing [happened] in the 30’s, 40’s, 50’s and 60’s but they often put the Black and brown bodies in police cars. I'm trying to equate what's happening today to what happened in the past and how current events are not that far off. It’s a hard pill to swallow and I don't want to traumatize my kids, but they also that's just American history. American history just so happens to be traumatizing simply because it is a hard pill to swallow. So it was it was hard to balance the events of the day. Because I do want to be
mindful that these are kids and these are concepts that are well beyond their years, but it's still something that they need to understand because they are a part of the history.

This quote describes how Annie engaged challenging historical topics—such as police brutality, hate crimes, and lynching—to contextualize students’ understanding of current events within the broader historical landscape of racism in America. Similarly, Mo felt compelled to challenge dominant historical narratives because she knew her students’ daily realities did not align with the messaging conveyed in the history curriculum. She shared, “I just keep looking at my kids, right? And I see they're all, they're Black and brown, like it's no way I'm going to whitewash them.”

Participants’ sentiments regarding teaching the truth about history is consistent with Black feminists and critical scholars’ writings that reject an ahistorical narrative of American history and pedagogy as a tool for fostering students’ critical consciousness (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Freire, 2000). These are characteristics associated with culturally informed teaching methods (Alim & Paris, 2017; Gay, 2002, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2009). For instance, Gloria Ladson-Billing’s (1995) seminal study on the characteristics of culturally relevant teaching conveys this approach necessitates a teacher who is culturally competent and bent towards fostering their students’ critical consciousness. Facilitation of students’ critical consciousness is often depicted as a characteristic of Black women’s pedagogy (2016). Guided by bell hooks’ theoretical frame of the oppositional gaze, a political frame by which “one learns to look a certain way in order to resist” (hooks, 1992, p. 116), Jacobs (2016) writes that Black women teachers who engage in fostering students’ critical consciousness do so as an analytic and practical exercise. Such activity fosters students’ ability to detect and critique negatives
messages (e.g., stereotypes, racialized and gendered tropes) that imply messages of inferiority. These findings are consistent with other investigations about Black women’s pedagogy and social justice teaching (Boone, 2020; Ramsey, 2012). For instance, Boone (2020) suggests these efforts emerge out of teachers’ lived experiences, unique standpoints, and awareness of intersecting oppressions. Elsewhere, this attention to critical consciousness is labeled as *emancipatory pedagogy*, a way to socialize students to “identify the root causes of their oppression and develop ways to address it” (Duncan, 2020, p. 2). Altogether, these findings are consistent with the literature and examine the interaction between fostering students’ critical consciousness and agency to challenge conventional ways of thinking.

Participants described intentions to teach the truth of American history despite the political landscape of anti-critical race theory debates. Participants believed their decision-making to teach the truth of American history was potentially risky. At the time of data collection, there was significant public discourse that incorrectly associated centering the lived experiences of minoritized communities and other teaching methods (e.g., socioemotional learning) as critical race theory (Morgan, 2022). These methods were perceived to make students feel uncomfortable to discourage patriotism (Ladson-Billings, 2021). In some states, teachers who engaged students in conversations about race and racism, critiqued American history, or assigned certain books suffered consequences, including but not limited to dismissal from one’s position (Pollock et al., 2022). While only two of the eight participants were able to explain what critical race theory meant, participants felt strongly about external forces that sought to control how teachers presented American history to their students. For example, Camile said, “I don't
care. If I get in trouble for teaching a child about Critical Race Theory, I don’t care. They need to know it.” She insisted that she had already been challenging dominant narratives about American history in her African American History course for over ten years and could not be convinced otherwise. Jay, an early career teacher who also taught African American History, stated she had always taught the “hard parts of history” even prior to the entry of critical race debates into the public spotlight. She revealed that she also “always kept the communication with the parents because I never sugarcoat anything in history.” These narratives reveal participants’ commitment to challenging dominant narratives in American history is not a veiled secret; rather, it is a stance that they are willing to defend despite opposition. This conclusion must be interpreted with caution, however, as participants conveyed their beliefs in terms of potential- not actual- risk.

**Theme #4: Guiding Students to Navigate a Racialized Society**

Participants explained guiding students with tactics and strategies to navigate a racialized society was an aspect of their pedagogy. Guided by their previous experiences and observations, they perceived a personal responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of their ethno-racially minoritized students. Mediated through their classroom pedagogy, they advised students to take certain precautions to remain safe and well in a racialized society. The aims of these pedagogical decisions were to foster students’ awareness about their own safety and wellbeing within the larger society in which their bodies may be feared, surveilled, or harmed. Like race-related current events, these discussions occurred at all grade bands.
Omi described how she conducted these conversations with two distinct age groups of students. With her 2nd graders, Omi often emphasized the importance of equal treatment and human dignity. She mentioned that she encourages her students to be kind to others, saying, “Don’t treat people different because they are different from you.” She also emphasized the possibility that they may experience unfair and unkind treatment (“But people will treat you different because you are different and that is not your fault.”). She then described how she contextualizes this conversation for an older group of students that she mentors. Omi said:

For the older students I mentor, I am kind of a Black Panther. [I tell them] You need to protect yourself. Stay away from those people. If you're in crowds where it's all white people around you, I need you to get out of there soon [because] that's not a place you want to be, unfortunately. You want to be in a place where you see a few faces that look like you.

She continued:

I don't try to guide them and tell them not to be friends with white people. I just tell them their lives are different. They have totally different experiences. [White friends] are not going to understand everything that you go through. You are going to have to think for yourself. You can't have a groupthink mentality; you can't think like them. You can't move like them... Unfortunately, y'all want to ride somewhere at one or two o'clock in the morning and your parents are letting you, you probably shouldn't go. That's how I talk to them. It is a very direct conversation. I remind them too, “You know what happened to so and so? You see what happened to that other person?”

These two excerpts reveal significant insight into Omi’s motivation. In the first excerpt, she alludes to the Black Panthers, a political organization whose mission was to promote self-sufficiency within the Black community and protection from state-sanctioned violence. Her language conveyed the need for students to defend themselves (“protect yourself”, “stay away”, “get out”). She also provided guidance on how to evaluate if a physical environment is conducive to their safety (“You want to be in a place where you
see a few faces that look like you”). In the second excerpt, Omi explains why her mentees must consider the relationship between the racial make-up of a space and their personal safety. She conveys that existing in racialized spaces holds different implications for them as Black youth than their white counterparts. She also anticipates a potential rebuttal and supplies evidence of why she believes her mentees should consider her guidance. By drawing attention to students who have experienced physical harm, she warns her mentees to heed her advice because their physical wellbeing is at stake. As an example, she mentioned in one of the interviews about a former student of hers who had been shot by the police. The video went viral. She said:

   We lost a former student. I don't know if you've heard about or how big it's gotten, but the baby got shot in Cobb County twice in the back. In the video, he was literally dying and saying, “Why did you shoot me?”

Like Omi, other participants experienced student loss as a factor shaping their pedagogical decision-making. Jannell, for example, lost two students between the first and third interviews. She expressed that the loss of a student to gun violence shaped how she understood her role as a Black woman teacher and the urgency of engaging her Black male students in these conversations. She mentioned an encounter with another student later that year after the loss of one of her students:

   I sat him down and I approached the conversation of what is it like to be a Black man on a white campus. Prior to this, I shied away from those conversations. I thought teachers like Mr. Peterson or whoever, they can handle that because they are Black men, but losing a student to gun violence. And I'm like, oh, no, let's go back. What can you do to avoid being in a [deadly] situation?

While Omi and Jannell lost students to two very different reasons; however, the common thread of these conversations reveals participants’ concern of their students’ physical safety while recognizing the social, historical, and political contexts in which they lived.
Omi and Jannell were concerned for the current wellbeing of their students, but their concerns were legitimized by previous loss of their students.

These stories convey the salience of Black women's standpoint as it relates to the sanctity of Black lives, and equipping minoritized children with tactics for their physical and psychological wellbeing. Although underexplored in teacher diversity literature, there are similarities between these attributes and Collins' (2000) depictions of Black women’s work and socialization for survival for Black children—particularly imparting the tools needed for minoritized youth to identify and navigate potentially hostile and violent situations. Socialization for survival attempts to "protect…from the dangers that lie ahead" (Collins, 2000, p. 187). Such actions emerge out of a political consciousness and self-imposed accountability for the wellbeing of the Black community. With reference to political consciousness and personal accountability, Omi and Janell's narratives reveal a desire to evoke students' to critically detect and maneuver intersecting oppressions so as to preserve their own lives and not become complicit in their subordination.

Violence and student deaths as factors shaping the teachers’ professional experiences and pedagogical decision-making is vastly under-explored in the literature. However, there are similarities between Omi and Jannell’s stories and those described in Duncan’s (2020) exploration of Black teachers’ emancipatory pedagogies. Drawing on a sample of three Black women and one Black man, the findings of this study reveal participants often engaged in conversations with students to prepare them for the possibility of interacting with racism and how to address it. These present findings, however, add to the literature base because participants’ pedagogical decision-making
was not only shaped by the current realities and negative interactions that many of their students shared with them. Their pedagogical decision-making was also shaped in part by previous loss of student life.

While Annie had not experienced the death of a student, she conveyed fear at the prospect of losing her students. She said:

I am afraid for my students. I [cry] for my kids all the time. I always tell them, you know, I just want you to be safe. I want you to come back to me in one piece. I don't want to lose any students. I have not lost any students personally, but we [as a school] have lost students. I just don't want to lose students on my watch.

Although she hadn’t lost any students to violence in the streets, she expressed an inclination to protect them both outside and inside the school. Indeed, Annie expressed great concern for her students’ psychological safety and exposure to racism at the hands of her predominantly white colleagues. She grappled with how to bring these discussions into the classroom for the purpose of alerting students to subtle forms of racism. She said:

I have a few students who are very warped in their understanding of what an ally is. And they're at the stage of where I am, where if they're not blatantly calling you a n*gger or if they're not blatantly saying something racist to you or stereotypical to you, then they're your ally. And I'm like, how do I tell a teenager that's not necessarily true? So that's why I'm struggling when it comes to those concepts and ideas.

Annie shared that her identity shaped her attitude about protecting her students. As a self-identified woman and mother, she described that she saw her students as her children. In fact, she often called her students, “my kids.” She described:

The moment that I talk to their parents, I say, "Our kid, our boy, our daughter". It's a village. And once you entrust your students to come to me, whether they're in my classroom or just in my building, you are mine. And I fight tooth and nail for my kids when they're in my presence. I tell them all the time, whenever you're not with me, I can't protect you and so I need you to make good choices. And I talk to them like a mama bear. They even see me as a mother or big sister figure because they say I'm too young to be their mom…So, I'm like a sister-figure to
them, but they're my kids and I take my kids personally, whether I met them for a minute, whether I have them for ten years, you're my kid.

In this excerpt, Annie reveals an *other-mothering* instinct to nurture and protect students. Black feminist theorists explain *other-mothering* as a practice in which Black women take on roles and responsibilities to protect, provide for, and nurture others in their immediate communities either in the absence of a maternal figure or as a supplemental resource (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1997; Case, 1997). Using “family language”, Annie’s care of her students conveys “the socially responsible individualism of Black women’s community work” (Collins, 2000, p. 190). Additionally, by drawing on the illustration of a mama bear, Annie positions herself as fictive kin and implies that she cares deeply for her students but can also be ferocious if provoked (see Stack, 1975).

She also revealed the limitations of her oversight. She said, “whenever you're not with me, I can't protect you and so I need you to make good choices.” By stating, “…make good choices”, Annie emphasizes the significance of students’ personal accountability to heed her advice. Altogether, Annie’s *other-mothering* is consistent with empirical and historical depictions of many Black women teachers who express maternal care for their students in the same ways that they do for their own children. For example, depictions of Marva Collins and Corla Hawkins often parallel their zeal for meeting the needs of their socioeconomically disadvantaged students with their personal drive to meet their own biological children's needs (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002).

This finding related to pedagogical decision-making as a tactic to guide students in a racialized society can also be understood through the lens of care as a characteristic of Black women’s pedagogy and an extension of their embodied wisdom. Black feminist scholars have demonstrated that care is a characteristic of great teaching (Hilliard, 1995)
and gives credence to students' emotional, psychological, and physical wellbeing inside and outside the classroom (Clark, 2019). Participants’ stories revealed an acute awareness of students’ vulnerability to intersecting systems of oppression and marginalization. Participants also revealed a personal responsibility to prepare students for present and future interactions with racism, hostility, and violence in a variety of contexts. Participants’ demonstrations of care did not absolve students of their responsibility; rather, their impassioned remarks implied an expectation that students were “accountable for their knowledge” (Collins, 1989, p. 768).

RQ #2: How do the ethno-racial and gender identities of self-identified Black women influence workplace interactions and relationships with colleagues and school leaders?

It is evident from the narratives that the ethnic, racial, and gender identities of the participants in this present study shaped interactions and relationships with colleagues and school leaders within and among ethno-racial and gender lines. The findings revealed micro-aggressions often characterized interracial interactions between participants and other school staff. Participants shared that their schools had diversity initiatives, but these failed to address the complexity of inter-racial dynamics. Participants also engaged in supportive same-race relationships with other self-identified Black staff. These findings are consistent with the literature base about ethno-racial match among minoritized teachers as it relates to improved workplace experiences (Bristol, 2018). Participant narratives, however, revealed some contradiction with this finding; some of Black women in this study expressed experiencing gendered micro-aggressions, particularly from Black men.
Theme #5: Experiencing Micro-aggressions in Interracial Interactions

Participants experienced different types of micro-aggressions within the context of interracial interactions. Sue (2010) defines micro-aggressions as actions and behaviors that communicate derogatory messages about an individual and/or a minoritized group by a dominant group member. Although micro-aggressions may be unintentional, researchers conclude that experiencing micro-aggressions can manifest in psychological and physical effects (Nadal et al., 2017). Types of micro-aggressions (e.g., micro-assaults, micro-insults, and micro-invalidations) have also been found to reinforce “marginality, and oppression applied to all socially devalued groups” (Sue, 2010). This theme is organized into these three types of micro-aggressions. By drawing on precise language, the aim of this theme is to complicate the overly simplified ways in which micro-aggressions are conveyed in teacher diversity literature regarding workplace racialization and discrimination (Amos, 2020; Duncan, 2020; Frank et al., 2021; Kohli, 2018).

Micro-assaults

Micro-assaults are “conscious, deliberate and either subtle or explicit … biased attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors that are communicated to marginalized groups through environmental cues, verbalizations, or behaviors” (Sue, 2010, p. 28). Specifically, participants experienced assaults on their competency with aspects of their practice. Annie and Mo described experiencing interactions with non-Black colleagues in which their pedagogical expertise and qualifications as classroom teachers were implicitly questioned. Due to her strong relationships with students, Annie described that she is
often tasked unofficially with supporting schoolwide culture as it relates to student behavior and discipline. In addition, Annie had recently been awarded a leadership position because of her competency. Despite these achievements, she described opposition from some colleagues. Annie describes there are “two or three vet teachers that have been here since I’ve been here, and I don’t think they take me seriously.” She shared anecdotes in which she felt disregarded by these veteran teachers to the point where they would speak over her or ignore her presence altogether. Annie shared:

They don't take me seriously. I get into my head. I'm thinking, maybe it's because I'm a young Black girl and they don't really want to take me seriously. So, when I'm talking about my success stories with students, they just downplay it, like “Well, you look like one of them.”

Annie’s experience is tied to her gender and racial identities and the ways in which they overlap with her youth. Annie describes herself as one of the youngest teachers at her school and the only Black woman teacher on a majority-white staff. In this excerpt, Annie describes how her colleagues are attributing her skillset as a classroom manager to a fixed trait—her race—over which Annie has no control. The implied message in this instance is that Annie is not as good a teacher as she seems. By attributing her success with students to ethno-racial match, they are disregarding the intellectual preparation and the emotional intelligence required to teach and manage students. Annie also perceived these micro-assaults about her competency in the classroom is linked to her colleagues’ sense of competition, not collaboration (Amos, 2020). Annie buffers against these micro-assaults, saying:

I really look like a student— you know, ‘Black don't crack’, but it's not my fault that although on top of me looking like a student, I can relate to my students, and I get my students to behave better than almost 100% of the other staff.
In this excerpt, Annie acknowledges that her youthful countenance is an advantage for aesthetic reasons. She also resists their assumptions about her competency as a teacher as she attributes her skills as the underlying factor for her success. This tactic can be understood as using micro-affirmations to buffer against racial micro-aggressions (Huber et al., 2021).

Like Annie, Mo experienced micro-assaults from white colleagues. Between the 2nd and 3rd interviews, Mo transitioned from a no-excuses charter with a moderately ethno-racially diverse staff to another public charter school where she was one of two Black women classroom teachers (albeit there were many Black classroom assistants and support staff). Mo described how the change in staff racial demographics influenced her daily professional experiences:

I have felt racism or rather micro-aggressions, lots of micro-aggressions from the staff... it just goes to show like the atmosphere and how it's different, because I worked with a lot of minority teachers at my old school. Although not using the precise language of micro-assaults, Mo reveals how the change in cultural dynamics taken together with environmental and interpersonal cues has impacted her exposure to subtle racial slights about her competency as a teacher. She provided another example of micro-assaults in the workplace with one teacher who had appointed herself to be Mo’s “mentor” to Mo’s displeasure. Mo described that she often disagreed with the mentor’s guidance and pointed to her experiences and student accomplishments in her previous school. However, Mo revealed that when these disagreements came up, the mentor would often point to Mo’s inexperience as to why Mo should comply with her recommendations. Mo internalized these interactions as micro-assaults. She said:

It was a dig at me to make me seem like I wasn't qualified to be there. The mentor lady tries to shame me all the time like that, because I don't have a lot of teaching
experience. She says things like, “Well, technically you only taught for like a year in person because the following year it was Corona.” And I'm like, "But in March it was Corona. And I taught in person all that whole year up until then."

In this excerpt, the self-appointed mentor appears to justify why Mo should heed her advice by diminishing Mo’s qualifications as a classroom teacher. She also discredits Mo’s experiences as an online teacher. Mo’s experiences with her mentor may in fact reveal insight to findings by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) regarding lower perceptions of instructional support held by self-identified Black women in comparison to other early career teachers. Furthermore, Annie and Mo’s experiences are consistent with findings by Kohli (2018) indicating a relationship between racial micro-assaults and implied messages about the competency and qualifications of teachers of color.

Camile also shared experiences with micro-assaults that she believed conveyed messages about her competency as a classroom teacher. Whereas Annie and Mo experienced micro-assaults from colleagues, Camile shared occurrences with white leaders. Camile expressed that she had a reputation for being a strong classroom manager to the point where she was pigeonholed as a disciplinarian and overlooked for other opportunities. She said:

The fact that as a Black woman, I'm considered to be the disciplinarian, right? I'm the first to cover classes or the first assigned to go on a field trip. These are things that I have fought to not to do.

As a teacher with over 10 years of experience, Camile expressed that she enjoyed the intellectual preparation and creativity required to develop engaging classroom lessons. However, she found that these professional characteristics were often overlooked. Although she had experienced a high volume of leadership turnover in her ten years, she
received repeated attention from leaders about her ability to manage a class, not her competency as a conveyor of knowledge. Camile said:

> It may not be [explicitly] articulated, but like if you're always being called on to do specific jobs, one can only believe that this is the road that you want me to take. I can do other things aside from telling children to sit down and be quiet. I have a brain and I can teach, and kids can learn from me.

Although Camile was not explicitly discouraged from taking on leadership responsibilities outside the classroom, she repeatedly encountered implicit messages about her worth associated with controlling students’ bodies. She described these messages as “micro and macro aggressions… [the] little interactions that happen that add the cuts to what you already have.” However, Camile learned to resist these micro-assaults; she described these as “things that I have to fight not to do”. She described one instance where she called out her leader, saying, “I'm not just good at disciplining children and I shouldn’t be used as your muscle.”

Annie, Mo, and Camile’s narratives reveal similar experiences of racial micro-assaults by their white colleagues. These micro-assaults call into question their qualifications and competency in respects to their practice (Dicken & Chavez, 2018). These assaults disregarded their embodied knowledge, lived experiences, and competency as classroom teachers.

There are, however, other possible explanations for their experiences. For example, Mo and Annie are early career teachers on a staff with mostly white staff, the majority of whom are older and have been teaching longer. Their colleagues’ sentiments may emerge out of surprise or concern at their early success with students. Regarding Camile, it may be quite possible that her ability to manage a class was superior and an attribute greatly valued by her leaders. She has been teaching for over a decade whereas
many of her colleagues are new teachers since there is constant churn (Dixon et al., 2018). High expectations are also an attribute of being a Warm Demander, a characteristic associated with many teachers of color. These possible sources may have influenced these interactions between the participants and other members of their school communities. Grounded in the salience of Black women’s embodied wisdom (Boone, 2020; Collins, 1989, 1990), it is critical to put their standpoint at the forefront and recognize the violence of these racial micro-assaults in their experiences.

**Micro-Insults**

Another type of micro-aggression, a micro-insult can be defined as a comment or action that conveys derogatory beliefs or messages about a minoritized individual’s background or heritage (Sue et al., 2008). For instance, Jay and Ana shared interactions with non-Black colleagues in which demeaning messages were conveyed about their racial group. Jay described racial tensions between the lower elementary teachers at her school (who were predominantly white) and the upper elementary teachers (of whom all but two were Black). As a biracial woman with light olive-tone complexion, Jay perceived that her white colleagues often engaged her in a different manner than her darker-skinned colleagues. She said:

> Being a light skinned black woman, white people are always more comfortable talking to you and being around you compared to your dark-skinned colleagues. And it kind of sucks because I'm not sure if [white folks] notice it or if it's intentional. Most of the time, I think it's because they don't notice. But, I also don't know, because most of the way people that have interacted with me in that way are in the elementary school, which is upstairs compared to downstairs in the middle school, where [Black staff are] fine talking with everyone. So, it's kind of weird... doing professional development because whenever I'm in a group or something like they just always feel most comfortable talking to me.
Although Jay appears to benefit from differential treatment, she feels unease with her white colleagues’ apparent discomfort around Black bodies. Jay’s discomfort surfaces because her own body has been racialized in encounters with police and authority figures during her childhood and adolescence. These racializing experiences contribute to her self-identification as a “Black biracial woman” although she frequently negotiates across Black and white racial contexts (Albuja et al., 2018). Jay also observes that her Black colleagues recognize their white colleagues’ discomfort. Jay described that her Black colleagues often make light of these racial dynamics. She said:

[Black staff members] even crack jokes about it. They say, “Oh, you know the elementary school and all of them white teachers and how they feel about us…they'll sing our praises and everything, but they won't talk to us.

The underlying connotation is an awareness among Black staff that white teachers do not interact with Black teachers. While Jay appears to be the exception to this rule; however, exceptionalism and tokenism can take the form of racial violence (Kohli et al., 2018). Although she is not explicitly disadvantaged by this practice, her disappointed tone and declaration that it “sucks…and it’s kind of weird” reveals the impact of this subtle racial slight.

During data collection, Ana transitioned from a dual language charter school in one Northeastern urban area to a public charter in another city. Like Jay, Ana shared experiences characterized by micro-insults from non-Black colleagues. Ana shared one experience that shaped her decision-making to leave her predominantly Latino school and to pursue employment at a school with more Black teachers.

Ana described the staff racial makeup of the former dual language charter school where she previously worked as diverse; nearly 50% of the staff identified as Latino and
represented many different Latin American countries and the remaining half were white Anglo-Americans. Despite the ethnic diversity, Ana described the school as racially homogenous. Though she described her former colleagues fondly as *la familia*, Ana also felt hyper-visible as an *Afro-Latina*. She said, "although I have *Latina* heritage, I am, above all else, seen as Black which I proudly am.” Ana described the encounter that led to believe that not all her colleagues had positive beliefs about the African diaspora. She described the story as it was told to her since she was not present at the time:

We had this student that just was new to the building, and he didn't know teachers by name. One of the science teachers asked him, “What room did you come from?” To which he replied in Spanish, “I came from that teacher’s room.” The science teacher was confused and asked which teacher. The student said, “The Black one.” The science teacher responded immediately, telling the student not to say that.

In Spanish, there are multiple terms to describe racial categories as well as skin tones. These can range from terms of endearment between loved ones or racial epithets. Ana expressed discomfort directed at the science teacher because of his attempt to correct the student because of his presumption that ‘Black’ had a negative connotation. She described her feelings, saying, “It made me feel uncomfortable…how do you get people to understand that the word, ‘Black’, is not bad, right?” Ana described that she withdrew socially for a while as she grappled with why she felt uncomfortable about this interaction and her colleague’s reactions. She said:

I didn’t know how to address it. It put me in a position of where I had to step back from all of this and just not say anything and just kind of like let it rock. I knew at some point I was going to have to say something. It did take me some time to get out of that funk and figure out what exactly to say and what exactly was uncomfortable about the entire interaction.
That moment catalyzed Ana’s decision to leave the dual language charter. She said:

I love my coworkers; I love my friends. But that piece on identity, that ethnic-racial [identity] like we can't talk about those things. Don't get me wrong. They're very much on a political correct level but when it comes to certain experiences, there's a gap that I have to deal with. It's like cognitive dissonance. I love this place, but I need to be somewhere different and so that was a difficult sort of moment of having to maneuver through the halls and still feel like I'm really seen in this place? Or am I just the Black teacher in the department, in the school? It was a very tough sort of time.

Though Ana shared pan-ethnic, linguistic, and cultural similarities with many of her colleagues, she describes that racial mismatch created gaps between her and other Latinos, some of which she did not fully realize until after she left. She internalized her colleague’s response as a micro-insult, signaling not only their discomfort but also causing her to question the extent to which her racial identity could be perceived as an asset in the workplace. Although under-explored in teacher diversity literature, Ana’s story resonates with findings presented elsewhere regarding pervasive colorism and discrimination of Afro-Latino individuals in pre-dominantly Latino spaces (Charles, 2021; Haywood, 2018).

**Micro-invalidations**

A micro-invalidation is a comment or action that either consciously or unconsciously nullifies the thoughts, feelings, and lived experiences of a minoritized individual (Sue et al., 2010). Regarding micro-invalidations, Camile described experiences in which overlapping racial and gender dynamics shaped her interactions with school leaders. She indicated that a former assistant principal often directed gender and race-based comments in reference to her as well as other women. She recalled how in the context of a content team meeting, he said, “women were only good for breastfeeding
and babies.” Although these comments would be offensive regardless of setting, she found them particularly disconcerting because he was the direct manager and leader for her content team. Thus, they interacted frequently, and he evaluated her professional performance. After several instances of racist and sexist remarks, she brought these to the school principal, another white man. She described the outcome of this conversation:

When I told my principal about it, his response to me was, "We will have a conversation with him." However, when [we] had a conversation with him about it because I was young and dumb, he doubled down on what he said. And it wasn't until two other white women who were with me who had themselves experienced his inappropriatenessness that all three of us went to our principal and he finally was like, "I should do something about this. This is not good.” And it was that year I knew I had to do. And then, in my end of year, my principal asked me if I learned something from the experience. It was like he threw it back in my face like I had done something wrong.

Camile expressed that her principal initially showed concern regarding the situation but then dispelled her concerns after meeting with the assistant principal. The principal neglected to pursue additional action until two white women became involved. His actions reveal insensitivity to Camile’s experiences; this lack of sensitivity continued as he put the situation back on her as if Camile was guilty of wrongdoing. Camile’s interaction with these two male leaders is a microcosm of larger gender- and race-based violence in which women are portrayed as untruthful (Crenshaw, 1990). As evidenced by historical and current events as well as popular culture (e.g., the #MeToo movement), there is an embodied struggle in which women- and women of color- are treated as liars-even to the point in which their testimonies about experiences of harm are not believed (Yarbrough & Bennett, 1999). After this and other interactions in which her thoughts, feelings, and workplace experiences were disregarded, Camile chose to retaliate in the form of planning her exit. She said, “I remember saying to my mom, like, I gotta go. I
think that was the year that I was like, let me start studying for the LSAT because it's clear that I don’t need to be here anymore.”

Omi also experienced micro-invalidation at a previous school. This occurred within the context of a negative interaction with a white male parent. However, her perception of the micro-invalidation was her school’s handling of the situation and disregard for how she experienced the interaction. It was ultimately the lack of support from school leadership that shaped her decision-making to switch schools. She described the situation:

I got suspended once for an interaction with a parent. I was talking to this doctor—this white male doctor— and giving him a briefing of what his child had been up to throughout the day. I told [the parent] that the child was using the bathroom often, but I didn’t think he was playing in there. I think he has an urge to use the bathroom, so I encouraged the parent to check for UTIs. But with him being a doctor, he said I couldn’t tell him anything about his child. I told him that I understood— he is in the medical field— but he wasn’t with his child all day. I was really the only person who could give him this information. He laughed in my face, then started talking over me to my teenage white teacher assistant. And I told him, I told him he was being really rude. That's all I said. He stormed off to the front office after I told him he was being rude. My school leader tried to calm me but by the time I got in my driveway, I was [told that I was] suspended without pay and told to stay home for the next three days.

In this anecdote, Omi shares what she perceives to be an antagonistic parent who invalidates her professional expertise because of his own status as a medical doctor. Omi internalized his disregard of her recommendation (signaled by his laughter and turning to her assistant) as both a dismissal of her professional opinion as an early childhood educator as well as a racial slight. Although it has been several years since this interaction, Omi’s detailed description of the events reveal how it profoundly shaped her professional experiences. Omi also revealed a sense of surprise and disgust at her school leader’s response. Instead of acknowledging the harm she experienced, she was punished
and suffered financial loss due to being placed on unpaid leave. She explained later: “But that situation lit a fire under my ass. I just knew I had to get out of here and that I wasn’t going to make it.” Akin to Camile’s decision-making to plan her departure from her school, this scenario prompted Omi to apply for other jobs. Within several weeks, Omi accepted a teaching position at the African-centered charter school and put in her two weeks’ notice.

This finding, experiencing micro-aggressions within the context of interracial interactions, seems to be consistent with other research exploring the interaction between staff ethno-racial composition, school racial climate, and oppressive workplace experiences of teachers of color (Amos, 2020; Duncan, 2019; Frank et al., 2021; Kohli, 2018). In fact, Rita Kohli and her co-researchers (2018) propose a link between school racial climate, teacher satisfaction, and turnover among teachers of color. In their analysis, Kohli and her team found experiencing these types of micro-aggressions took "a toll on their well-being, growth, and retention” (p. 309). Unexplained, however, are the ways in which teachers of color employ their agency to resist oppressive work contexts. In fact, it can be argued that turnover is a form of embodied resistance to oppressive environments and interpersonal interactions. In fact, Ana, Camile, and Omi’s stories communicate pursuit for self-valuation; their experiences in micro-aggressive encounters undergirded their decision-making to leave their schools.

Other forms of resistance to micro-aggressions are largely under-explored in teacher diversity literature. In this present study, Ana, Camile, and Omi chose to plan their exits in response in part due to gendered and racial micro-aggressions. In fact, Ana and Camile planned their exit for several years whereas Omi’s exit took mere weeks. On
the other hand, Annie uses micro-affirmations to buffer against the micro-assaults that she experienced during interactions with her colleagues. Mo also described how she often responds to racial slights in interpersonal interactions. She said:

I'm really good with holding my composure together, even if I feel offended by someone, but I will let them directly know my true self and let them see my face and know they made me upset. But, I just choose to disengage from the conversation until I'm ready to engage again because my mouth can get a little bit lethal. I'm trying to get better with that. Sometimes I feel like it's best if I just revisit when emotions aren't attached in that moment.

Omi also expressed some elements of resistance against her white colleagues (particularly pushing back against colleagues’ expressed deficit beliefs about their Black students), but none directly in context of micro-aggressive interactions. This discrepant data might be attributed to the individualized pace of identity development and racial stress coping skills (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019).

Scholars have begun to emphasize the importance of language when talking about micro-aggressive experiences. While these concepts (e.g., micro-assaults, micro-insults, and micro-invalidations) may overlap and are without clearly defined boundaries, precise language is useful to detect the variety of contexts and form in which these may take place and act (Harrison & Tanner, 2018). It is interesting to note that participants didn’t classify the types of micro-aggressions that they experienced. Sometimes, they described the interaction as a micro-aggression; others had clearly experienced types of micro-aggressions but did not have the language to name their experiences. However, each of the participants revealed ways in which they reject the implied messages conveyed by micro-aggressions. These observations lend themselves to intriguing questions regarding the relationship to experiential knowledge, embodied wisdom, and resistance.
Many participants indicated that their schools implemented diversity initiatives in the form of implicit bias and cultural sensitivity training. Participant narratives revealed that these initiatives overlooked the complex interaction between identity, positionality, and power. These initiatives also overlooked school workplace interpersonal dynamics.

Beyoncé shared that her school implemented implicit bias and diversity training. She found these helpful to navigate the challenges of working in a Title 1 school and students with special needs. Beyoncé found topics such as trauma to be valuable because they allowed her to reflect on her background and biases. However, she found that these topics were often situated within the context of her minoritized and low-income students. Absent from the conversation were how topics such as trauma might be beneficial to improving interpersonal dynamics and staff relationships in the school. While Beyoncé found these training to be beneficial to her personal practice, she explained that these training did not shift her expectations about how racism was transacted in the workplace. 

She said:

This is America. It is a country heavily rooted in like racism; it is rooted in institutions and systems that are designed to oppress. I don't care how many social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion committees you implement… the truth is that those are drops in a bucket. They are good, but they are just drops in a very racist bucket.

In this excerpt, Beyoncé reveals her belief that school diversity initiatives are insufficient to upend institutional racism and white privilege in society and schools. In talking about her colleagues, Beyoncé states, “I expect you to be a racist”. This is not a personal attack on the character of her colleagues, but rather signaling the inadequacy of short-term efforts to address deeply ingrained systems and ideologies of racial inequality. Moreover,
the failure to contextualize implicit bias and diversity training within the frame of staff
dynamics lends itself to ‘color muting’ significance of ethno-racial difference on adult
interactions and relationships (Kohli, 2018; Pollock, 2009).

During the first interview, Annie described her school as moderately progressive
because implicit bias training was a cornerstone of the school’s professional development
program. However, during the second interview, Annie revealed that despite the
appearance of progressive values, she found the school’s implicit bias training to be
inadequate because of the lack of trust among adults. In fact, she described that these
events are “triggering” for staff of color. She attributes these racial triggers to the lack of
trust between staff members “for us to say certain things and not have it seem as though
it's an attack.” She observes that these conversations are dominated by staff members of
color while the white staff are silent during these sessions. Observing her colleagues’
fragility, Annie also disengages from these sessions. She says, “I don't see the purpose of
these training, which is why I'm so disengaged with many of it, because I'm like, there's
nothing there that I'm getting out of it that I didn't already know.” Annie is also frustrated
by the lack of strategic follow-through with the implicit bias training. She said:

After we have the training, it just goes on that hill and dies there. [Race] is only
mentioned in professional development. I don't really see anything coming out of
the professional development or if it’s monitored in any way…We just have a
reflection question and then once at three o'clock, we're done. It's like the
conversation just gets shut off… It’s just being done to check a box. More so it's
not being done wholeheartedly because there's a change that needs to happen.

Annie believes that these conversations are critical to facilitate inter-racial and cross-
cultural conversation. However, she argues in this section that the efficacy of these
sessions are undermined by the lack of progress monitoring and meaningful commitment
to weave session topics into their daily work as a school faculty. Elsewhere, she
described a recent interaction where a white teacher used the n-word in an interaction with a student. She insinuated that this was not a standalone event, saying, “it happens all the time.” This signals that these PD sessions are ineffective to improve adult collegiality let alone mitigate racism directed towards students. Annie also expressed that there are Black staff members who are “very harmful, very triggering to students”. She agrees that a focus on different dimensions of identity (e.g., gender), social location (e.g., social class, educational attainment), and bias would help to improve inter-racial interactions and relationships in the building as well as improve student learning conditions.

Camile echoed Annie’s beliefs that her school’s implementation of diversity initiatives required intentional disentangling of issues related to race and racism. She also described her school as progressive and gave numerous examples to support her claims. For instance, the school supplied its staff with ‘Black Lives Matter’ t-shirts and allowed all staff to dress down on Mondays provided they wear social justice-themed shirts. Also, the school had a recent set of training on the School to Prison Pipeline and had overhauled their student disciplinary system to reduce out of school time for low-level behavioral infractions. Taken together with the fact “we have a Black male principal”, Camile states, “…people feel like we are moving the needle in race and racism.” Camile perceived this is a reductive stance that overlooked structural inequalities related to teachers of color- and Black teachers specifically- at her school. Drawing on anecdotal data, Camile shared that the school did not have any women leaders of color, and teachers of color are often overlooked in leadership roles outside of discipline. She has also observed high rates of turnover among teachers of color over her 10+ years at that school. To pursue racial justice and address racial inequalities, Camile proposes that
school diversity initiatives interrogate the nuances of how racism is transacted in the workplace. She said:

First of all, not every skin folk is kinfolk. Number one. Number two, race and racism go beyond having a black man [as principal]. We have to look at systems and policy that we enact that support or don't support our students and staff… I think that because we are seemingly doing the right things, we don't feel the need to have those conversations.

Here, Camile challenges the efficacy of her school diversity initiatives. Her first point implies rejection of essentialism (Alinia, 2015). She points out that although her principal is Black, his current social location as an upper middle-class, college-educated man lends itself to different life experiences than the students they serve. His current social location may also lead to very different life experiences than other staff of color at the school. Her second point interrogates the differences between progressive liberalism, performative allyship, and anti-racist co-conspirators (Love, 2019); she implies that effective anti-racism initiatives require attention to visible and invisible factors that lead to inequalities and barriers faced by students and staff of color.

The experiences of teachers of color regarding diversity initiatives is an area that is underexplored in the literature. These present findings add to teacher diversity literature but also problematize their existence, particularly if minoritized individuals are disengaging from these sessions because they do not lend themselves to improving their students’ experiences nor their own. Absent from their discussion of diversity initiatives are the ways in which dimensions of identity other than race are examined. In fact, one might hypothesize that the erasure of intersectional experiences may partly explain why Annie and Camile experienced racial and gendered micro-aggressive interactions with white colleagues and leaders.
The findings in this section can also be understood through Black Feminist Thought and longstanding critiques that antiracist politics conflate within group differences in respect to gender and other identities (Crenshaw, 1990). That is not to say there isn’t an overlap or similarities in the ways in which self-identified members of the African diaspora experience discrimination. However, a unilateral exploration of Black women’s experiences does not produce racial and gender justice. Instead, justice requires attention to the ways in which discrimination may be compounded by the presence of multiple subordinate identities. Crenshaw (1989) writes that “this focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiple-burdened, and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of information” (p. 140). As such, Black women’s standpoint presents itself as a frame by which to re-imagine anti-racist work that address intersecting system of oppression and marginalization.

Of the participants, Jay was the only teacher who embraced her school’s diversity efforts. When asked about the last effective professional development session that she attended, she spoke of a recent event in which a select group of 8th graders shared about their recent trip to a citywide diversity forum for children. Held over Zoom, students shared their experiences interacting with students- particularly white children- from other parts of the city and the ways in which these interactions across the lines of ethno-racial identity shaped their perception of antiracism efforts. Jay explained that this session was popular with her colleagues; staff also asked to have another similar session in the upcoming school year. However, it appears that this one-and-done event did not address
intersectionality, social location, or interpersonal relationships among school stakeholders (staff-to-staff or staff-to-student).

Theme #7: Participating in Supportive Intra-Racial Relationships

Participants depicted supportive relationships with Black colleagues led to tangible forms of professional and personal assistance. Also, participants shared that workplace relationships with other Black teachers (and Black women in particular) were a means of solidarity to combat isolation and guidance to navigate workplace dynamics.

Mo, Camile, and Ana described forming meaningful bonds with other Black women at work. These relationships provided a sense of solidarity both due to shared lived experiences and shared similarities. Mo spoke about forming relationships with other Black women teachers in her new school. In her previous school, Mo expressed that there was solidarity among the diverse staff. In her new school, however, she gained new appreciation for relationship-building with other Black women teachers, particularly to buffer against the micro-aggressions that she experienced from her white colleagues and “mentor”. Mo also realized her presence mattered to her Black women colleagues. She shared how she learned this:

Within my grade band, I'm very close to the other Black girl…And of course, we're close to each other. And she was just happy that I was there because she was the only Black person on the team. When she first got there, she said it was a bit lonely.

Echoing Mo’s sentiments, Camile shared that she had grown to appreciate the sisterhood of other Black teachers that formed over her 10 years at her school. Camile described that camaraderie and collegiality with her Black female teachers helped her to make sense of her professional experiences and buffer against the racialized and gendered micro-
aggressions that she sustained from white colleagues and school leadership. These relationships also carried over into her personal life as she described, “we all hang out outside of work.”

Whereas Camile worked in a school with many other Black women teachers, Ana was the only self-identified Black woman teacher at her former job. Ana explained that she often felt racially isolated from her Latina colleagues. When asked to describe times in which she felt “seen” in her workplace, she described a special relationship she had with the dean of students, another self-identified Black woman. Ana pinpointed why she felt a sense of closeness with the dean of students. She said:

It may seem very simple, but it means so much because I can’t even remember the last time I had a conversation about hair with anyone at work. And I realized I don't because nobody at my job looks like me except for [the dean]… She has locs. I have locs. She has the same texture hair that I do. And I thought, wow, that's what makes this relationship very, very beautiful.

For women of the African diaspora, hair holds significant individual and collective meaning. It represents complex and difficult histories of “oppression, misogyny, and social class hierarchy” (Brooks & McNair, 2014). Hairstyle choices can be a political statement in their rejection of Eurocentric beauty standards or in their assimilation (Jha, 2015). Ana’s hair signifies her Afro-lineage; it represents the ways in which her personhood as a dark-skinned Garifuna-Honduran woman is both hyper-visible and invisible in her workplace (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Ana’s hairstyle choice is also a symbol of her resistance against assumptions about pelo malo (bad hair) and pelo bueno (good hair), which are deeply ingrained aspects of anti-Blackness in Latino culture in which straight hair is elevated as beautiful whereas curly hair may be referred to as un pajón (meaning “straw” but connotes messy or unruly hair; see Hordge-Freeman &
Veras, 2020). Instead, Ana stated that she has always “embraced her natural hair”, never seeing it as a “problem” unlike many of her Latina friends growing up. Instead, she engages in self-defining her hair as pelo bueno (good hair) in ways that are unshared by her white and Latina colleagues who do not have her texture. Instead of experiencing marginalization due to her locs (Lisle-Johnson & Kohli, 2020), Ana partakes in ideological communion and a “very, very beautiful” relationship with her Black female colleague over their shared experiences with hair.

Regarding participants’ relationships with other Black women, seminal writers in Black Feminism suggest, due to personal and collective histories, some Black women engage in sisterhood bonds to buffer racial and gendered isolation and marginalization (Collins, 1989). These sisterhood bonds also lend themselves to epistemological validation, the endorsement of their embodied wisdom and standpoint. This is particularly important in sociocultural and historical contexts in which Black women's epistemologies are suppressed, oppressed, or erased (Collins, 1989; Dotson, 2015). Dotson (2015) writes, "For Black women, new knowledge claims are rarely worked out in isolation from other individuals and are usually developed through dialogues with other members of a community" (p. 763).

Black Feminist Thought is also a lens by which to understand relationships among Black women as a safe space for self-definition and self-valuation. These can also assist to buffer against marginalization which may arise in spaces with Black men or white women (Gines, 2015). Collins (2000) writes:

Historically, safe spaces were “safe” because they represented places where Black women could freely examine issues that concerned us. By definition, such spaces become less “safe” if shared with those who were not Black and female. (p. 110)
This concept of “safe spaces” is powerful particularly in the ways that these are co-constructed by Black women and serve as a mechanism to persist in the face of opposition. Moreover, participation in these “safe spaces” equip women to draw strength from each other’s resilience and re-define their realities in community with one another. Also, the stories of these participants lend themselves to understand that “safe spaces” transcend the material and physical; whereas some define safe spaces as racial justice sessions (Kohli et al, 2019) or affinity groups (Kohli, 2019), simple mechanisms such as hair can be the foundation.

Participants conveyed their Black colleagues often played profound roles in providing assistance and guidance in relation to navigating workplace dynamics. For instance, Camile shared that the school’s professional development was often insufficient in meeting her needs as a veteran teacher and better suited for new teachers. Due to insufficient capacity and gaps in content knowledge, her direct managers were unable to provide the instructional support that Camile found meaningful. Drawing on her sense of agency, Camile often participated in informal instructional collaboration with other Black women to impact her classroom practice. She said:

I love collaboration. Just because I've been teaching for 10 years doesn't mean I have it right. It doesn't mean I know everything. There's always some child that says I didn’t do something right or that I didn’t say something right. And you know how I respond? I tell them they are right. There was a year when there was a Black Lit teacher, me and then a Black composition teacher, and we sat in each other's rooms and we collaborated not only with like my lessons, but it was like cross-content collaboration. And what was beautiful about it was kids would go from one class to the other. They were making these connections and I didn't have to sit there and, like, make it for them. Their writing was beautiful, and they were learning!
In other anecdotes, Camile also shared that she took advantage of online instruction during the pandemic to visit her Black colleagues’ classrooms to supplement the inadequate training she received from her school leaders about teaching via Zoom. She explained that she specifically selected colleagues to work with whom she perceived were “like-minded” and had similar high academic expectations for their students. Hence, Camile’s relationships with ideologically compatible Black women teachers furnished the means to navigate her frustration and dissatisfaction due to inadequate instructional support and training.

Beyoncé also shared examples of how other Black educators profoundly shaped her approach to navigating workplace dynamics. Beyoncé is deeply convinced that her life’s purpose is to “educate, empower, and encourage the youth”. This purpose statement shapes her laser-like focus on her work as an educator and how her actions directly influence her students. However, Beyoncé described that she often disengages with activities that she perceives fall outside the scope of this purpose statement. Although this purpose statement keeps her connected to her reason for teaching, Beyoncé described that it also led to interpersonal tensions with other colleagues as an early career teacher. She described, however, that former interactions with a Black male educator and teacher trainer played a pivotal role in helping her navigate these workplace tensions. She said, “He helped me so that I didn't come off as like the ‘angry Black woman’, even though I wasn’t.” Beyoncé described this informal coaching relationship as an important turning point, helping her to understand the optics of her attitude in the workplace and the ways that these may be racialized and gendered by her non-Black co-workers.
Ana’s decision-making to leave the dual language charter school and accept employment at her new school was shaped in part by the desire to develop relationships with other Black colleagues. On day one of new teacher orientation, she described meeting many new colleagues who identified as members of the African diaspora. Ana also met another employee who identified as “Garifuna by way of Guatemala”. This was her first time encountering another Garifuna in a professional setting. She described feeling a sense of pride and empowerment to work in a space where her complex identities were represented. His presence fulfilled her aspiration to be “seen in the workplace”, which she believes could not occur at her former school. Ana described the nature of her relationship with the young Garifuna man and the ways in which they leaned on each other for support in navigating their new workplace. Ana described that she leaned on her background as an English teacher to give him guidance about incorporating cultural methods of teaching into his instruction. She described one of their conversations in which she encouraged him to see that rigor and cultural relevance were not mutually exclusive:

I believe he wanted to do like Black Boy or Native Son or one of those and I think the department chair told him those were cool but there were other examples of the canon that should be taught in the classroom. So I told [my colleague], “Listen, you are in charge of your curriculum. If you want to do books that are only created by Black voices, Black authors, you can do that as long as the standards are in place. Yes, the canon is important, but they have three more years of English. The school can figure it out.”

In this excerpt, Ana empowers her Garifuna colleague to resist the pressure that it was his responsibility to teach the Eurocentric books that the school defined as ‘the canon’. In addition, she encouraged him to consider how a standards-based approach can be applied to all texts regardless of authorship or origin. Like other participants in this study, Ana’s
experiences reveal that professional guidance in navigating workplace dynamics was often reciprocal: many of the women expressed relationships with their Black colleagues as a vehicle for receiving support and being of service to their colleagues.

Experiencing Intra-Racial Conflict

The findings revealed evidence that intra-racial relationships were often characterized by solidarity, empowerment, and a support in navigating workplace dynamics. This is consistent with scholarship investigating interactions between teacher ethnic-racial match and school workplace ecology (Bristol, 2018). However, in contrast to earlier findings, participating in supportive intra-racial relationships, some participants experienced intra-racial conflict with some of their Black colleagues. Although not a significant experience shared by all the participants, this contradiction merits investigation.

Omi shared that she was often othered by Black colleagues because of her light features. Although this occurred in the form of light-skinned jokes, she shared, “I don't really take offense because I know they're joking, but then again, there's a little bit of truth in every joke.” Jay's experience can be described as “horizontal hostility” (Campion, 2019, p. 196). Horizontal hostility is one of many terms to describe the ways in which one's participation and membership in an ethno-racial group is questioned because of multiracial heritage (Campion, 2019; see also Ingram et al., 2014). Like racial micro-aggressions, these can be light, and take the form of banter. However, these still come with psychological effects for those who experience this type of conflict from their ethno-racial group and cause them to question their belongingness. This idea of
horizontal hostility is under-explored in teacher diversity literature and the ways in which teachers of color may experience conflict from those who share their ethno-racial background. However, it is critical to understand the potential of horizontal hostility as a factor that undermines initiatives to enact culturally affirming and inclusive workplace ecologies.

Ana described the staff of her new school as being very racially diverse. Her new principal is a Black woman and many of the classroom teachers and support staff identify as Black. In this manner, the staff reflect the student racial demographics. In her new school, however, she described that she had not yet encountered any self-identified Latino students nor staff other than the other Garifuna male. She described that she felt stigmatized by one of her Black male colleagues because of her Honduran heritage and Spanish accent:

I'm sure he's just doing it to tease, but that doesn't necessarily make it okay. When we first met, we were talking about where we're from and the whole accent thing came up again as well as the question of where I’m from. He always makes comments; he tries to speak Spanish in my presence, or he will make references to something that had to do with Mexico. I tell him that [shared] language doesn't necessarily mean that all countries are the same or all cultures are the same. There's nuance. He does things like that, and I’m constantly having to check him and check him and check him. He’s like a class clown or the adult version of a class clown. I don't know how much of it stems from ignorance, not knowing, or just wanting to push buttons. I don't know where it's coming from, but just having to correct [him] is exhausting. It's not like I've not never had to do that, but it's just been so long since I've had to do anything like because I’ve been surrounded by people that just understood.

In this instance, she expresses confusion about these interactions and the ways he imposes subtle racial slights through the form of jokes. Ana is quick to correct his cultural assumptions and appears to assume the best of his actions. However, it is apparent that she perceived his actions as offensive and inappropriate. Indeed, these
micro-aggressive comments impose demeaning messages and stereotypes about Latino peoples. This contradiction is consistent with Kohli’s (2012) argument for critical consciousness training for teachers of color to facilitate their motivation to be agents of change by facilitating their awareness about racialization as a factor impacting all communities of color.

Camile shared that she experienced intra-racial relationships with Black women in a different way than she experienced them with Black males. Drawing on her professional experience as evidence, she stated, “Black women in many cases, for many people will be your biggest supporters, however. I have found that sometimes that support is not reciprocal, especially from Black men. Especially when it comes to things like relationships and sometimes even in positions of power, you're almost overlooked for someone else.” Although she fails to give concrete examples, Camile’s conclusions are consistent with how power and privilege are moderated along the lines of gender identity. While Camile was the only participant who pointed out these experiences of intra-racial conflict from Black men, many participants failed to talk about Black men altogether, sharing only about their affection for other Black women in the workplace. Mo shared about a Black male leader, who she points to as one of the contributing factors for leaving her workplace. However, her dissatisfaction was rooted in feeling unsupported and undermined by his leadership; she also questioned his integrity and honesty when talking about school data with the network officials and with parents. However, her feelings may be influenced by the inherent power dynamics between them as teacher and school leader (Lipman, 1997). Conversely, the only participant who indicated a preference for Black males: Beyoncé. She describes the presence of Black male educators in the workplace as
“comforting”. While other participants describe an affinity to develop relationships with other Black women in their personal and professional lives, Beyoncé says, “I know sometimes there is the whole "strong Black woman, black independent woman" schema but I've not subscribed to that.” Instead, she reinforces, “the Black male presence means a lot to me and does a lot for me.”

Altogether, there was insufficient evidence to determine a trend in how participants in this study experienced relationships with Black men. However, these stories of intra-racial conflict in the form of colorism and horizontal hostility, stereotyping, and lack of support explain the variety of ways in which Black women face the compounded effects of marginalization due to their overlapping identities.

RQ #3: How do ethnic, racial, and gender identities influence how Black women teachers negotiate their identities to adapt to working conditions in urban schools?

The analysis of participant narratives revealed several themes related to how Black women teachers negotiate their identities in response to school working conditions. Identity negotiation refers to the internal construction of identity and how it is managed in the context of interpersonal interactions and environmental cues (Jackson, 2002, 2004). Of the eight participants in this study, six participants revealed sociocultural and organizational aspects of working conditions in predominantly white schools influenced their decision-making to adapt their behavior. This is most evident in interactions with colleagues and school leaders. Three themes emerged from the data analysis. First, participants adapted to buffer against cultural stereotypes. Next, participants adapted to achieve desired ends. Finally, participants rejected culturally biased interpretations of professionalism, instead seeking to re-define professionalism on their own terms. Taken
together with Black Feminist Thought, the Cultural Contract Paradigm (Jackson, 2002, 2004) informs the analyses of these themes.

Theme #8: Avoiding Gendered Racial Stereotypes

Six of the eight participants revealed making conscious and unconscious decisions to negotiate their identity to avoid and buffer against gendered racial stereotypes in school contexts with predominantly white staff. For instance, Annie described how she adapted her tone and mannerisms in encounters with her white colleagues and leadership.

She said:

I'm very loud, I'm very playful and I can be very aggressive. However, I don't want to be seen as the angry Black woman. On the other hand, I also don't want to be seen as a super strong Black woman.

Annie’s awareness of these gendered racial stereotypes undergirds her decision-making to negotiate her identity. In Annie’s case, she doesn’t want her inclination to be “loud”, “playful”, and “aggressive” to be gendered and racialized by her colleagues and leadership. Annie’s fear of being seen as “aggressive” and an “Angry Black Woman” is representative of the controlling images often pervasive in media and marketing (Walley-Jean, 2009). Her reference to the “strong Black woman” also reflects the “The Black Matriarch” trope in which a woman is depicted as overly self-sufficient and absent of feminine traits while also emasculating to men around her (Collins, 2002). Annie also explained that she is aware of their discomfort due to previous observations she has made of their reactions towards Black students. She indicates:

I find myself like lightening my voice, so I don't come off as aggressive because I already know how you feel about students who are aggressive and talk to you in a certain way.
In this statement, Annie reveals that she sees the students as a reflection of herself. She shares ethno-racial group membership with students as well as other commonalities in terms of social location (e.g., upbringing in a low-income urban area). As such, Annie communicates a sense of vulnerability about her positionality since she hears what white staff members say about their Black students behind closed doors. Annie contrasted these interactions with white staff members and described how she acts with the members of the school’s disciplinary team, all of whom are Black. She said, “When I go to talk to my Black coworkers, I can draw out my words… I don't have to feel like I'm being judged…” Annie is a qualified and competent teacher; so much so that she has been repeatedly granted additional leadership opportunities by her administration. However, she acknowledged a lingering fear of gendered racialization and therefore, attempted to manage white colleagues’ potential perceptions by shifting her identity as to not reflect stereotypes about Black women. However, Annie admits to abandoning these behaviors when in the company of Black students and colleagues. She does not fear judgment for being forthright with her true self in these inter-racial encounters. Annie’s explanation of identity shifts reveal that these are temporary episodes and influenced by the sociocultural norms of those with whom she is surrounded at the time (Jackson, 2002, 2004). In fact, these unwritten sociocultural dynamics are consistent with those of the white Western middle-class norms by which all other forms of cultural diversity are measured (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). As such, identity negotiation is Annie’s coping strategy to avoid stereotypes.

Mo also shared that she negotiates her identity to avoid racialized and gendered assumptions by white staff members. She indicated, “when I'm at school, you know, I'm a
little bit more peppy. I'm already very bubbly- already super bubbly- but I just like pep up my voice.” Mo described these are behaviors that she takes on with all white staff members in the school, not just those with whom she has had micro-aggressive encounters. Although Mo maintains a “peppy [and] bubbly” façade, Mo describes that these outward behaviors are shaped by her avoidance of cultural stereotypes. She elaborated:

I'm [actually] guarded. A bit more than I would like to say. I don't think it's a bad thing. I just don't want the angry Black woman trope to be painted for me, especially in the workplace.

This contrast of her external and internal realities reveals Mo’s decision-making is guided by perceived vulnerability and self-preservation. Like Annie, Mo shifts her identity to mitigate association with controlling images. By negotiating her identity, Mo believes she can control how she is perceived by others and buffer against potential discrimination by the dominant group.

Jannell expressed similar concerns about her white colleagues and leaders’ perception of her and the ways in which these perceptions can be influenced by gendered racial stereotypes about Black women. Jannell shared that how she was perceived in the workplace had short and long-term effects. Additionally, they impacted her decision-making about how to act in the workplace. To avoid conflict, she often found herself shifting her tone and mannerisms to adapt to sociocultural workplace norms. Explaining her motivation, she said:

I don't want it to come off as I'm aggressive and I'm hard to work with. And God forbid I need you for reference and I'm trying to move on to another job. I don't want that to follow behind me- especially as a Black woman!
This excerpt comes from a longer story in which Jannell expressed frustration on how to advocate for herself in the workplace. She described that during the Covid-19 pandemic, there was significant leadership turnover, and she was often without clear guidance and support. She described feeling unsuccessful, particularly in navigating the challenges of teaching online as a new teacher and someone assigned to teach a content area in which she was not certified. She was also hyper-vigilant about how she was perceived when engaging across the lines of ethno-racial and gender difference with colleagues and leadership in her pre-dominantly white school with male school leaders. Jannell wrestled with how to draw attention to the need for instructional support without being stereotyped as “aggressive”. However, she also found it challenging to remain quiet when she perceived that her shortcomings were impacting her students. At the same time, she perceived that any attempts to self-advocate were unwelcome because it likely would not align with the sociocultural dynamics that she observed in interpersonal encounters from her colleagues and leadership. In describing the sociocultural dynamics of the workplace, she said, “It's just constant smiling all the time. I don't want to seem like I am disrupting the norm of whatever you've established here.” This statement reveals Jannell’s intentions; her goal is to mitigate potential conflict with white colleagues and leaders by maintaining the perceived social order of her workplace. If she failed to do so, she perceived she would be at risk for being stereotyped. Presuming a cultural mismatch since she was the only Black woman teacher in a mostly white school with white leadership at the time, she sought to adapt to the organizational norms of the workplace to reconcile cultural mismatch. Doing so, however, complicated the way she was able to advocate for her professional needs.
Likewise, Jay negotiated her identity to adapt to unwritten sociocultural norms. Jay revealed that she even shifts her identity unconsciously at times. She said:

I sometimes do it without realizing it. It’s almost funny how I make the switch—one minute talking to my Black colleagues, the next minute talking my white colleagues. You can almost hear my voice change… I almost felt like it’s my customer service voice because that's how I talk and communicate with my white colleagues is very similar to the customer service voice that I had [at my last job] before I became a teacher.

Jay’s choice of the term, “customer service” implies that she perceives a need to be deferential during these exchanges. As such, Jay responds to an internal impetus to shift her identity in these moments and accommodate her white colleagues (Jackson, 2002). Jay’s participation in this activity is completely one-sided as she does not expect white leadership and colleagues to reciprocate. Jackson (2002) characterizes such unilateral identity shifts as “relational coordination” in which there are underlying power asymmetries between parties and unspoken assumptions that the minoritized individual has less power and therefore must acquiesce to the norms of the cultural majority. He suggests the perception of these power dynamics may lend themselves to a sense of vulnerability and dependency on the cultural majority. Although members of the cultural majority do not reciprocate identity shifts nor feel the need to do so, Jackson suggests the minoritized individual may feel the pressure to momentarily assimilate or adapt their worldview and behaviors to the norms associated with the cultural majority for the sake of their own perceived survival.

In contrast, Jay explained that she negotiated her identity differently among her Black colleagues. She shared:

When I am with my Black colleagues, I feel like I can be more of myself. And I could be more myself around, and I don’t have to speak proper English. You know, we can banter a little bit, we can crack jokes.
In the above excerpt, Jay implies a sense of comfort and safety around her Black colleagues. She says, “I can be more of myself.” Though she is also white, her decision-making about identity negotiation around white colleagues implies a sense of hyper-vigilance and self-monitoring that she does not feel with her Black colleagues. Like Annie, she negotiates her identity differently with her Black colleagues in ways that mirror how she perceives her authentic self.

Cultural Contract Theory is a tool to understand the ways in which individuals negotiate their identities in response to interpersonal and environmental cues (Jackson, 2002, 2004). Regarding minoritized individuals, it is a tool to understand how differences are managed in inter-cultural contexts and interactions (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Individuals participate in cultural contracts with themselves as well as with others. Therefore, how one understands their identities cannot be divorced with their decision-making to negotiate their identities with others. Annie, Mo, Jannell, and Jay shared stories of identity negotiation; they all admitted to shifting their identities to adapt to workplace norms. Regarding how they made meaning of their own ethno-racial and gender identities, the participants were all proud to be Black women. Annie revealed that to her, “Being a Black woman means to be aware and be conscious of who you are and not.” She described that it meant, “Not backing down from your identity to make somebody else feel comfortable.” Similarly, Mo expressed that she associated her ethno-racial and gender identities as strength, love, and “spreading that love.” She also described “it also means allowing myself to be upset about things and to be angry and to be mad, even though I’m told, you know, as a woman and as a Black woman, you cannot be mad.” Jannell found it empowering to be a Black woman. On the other hand, Jay
conceptualized her identity as a Black biracial woman as “strong, resilient, determined, and also passionate… passionate about what you do and also passionate and in regard to being black.” However, their stories of identity shifting reveal that they do not negotiate their identities with white colleagues in the same way that they negotiate their identities with Black counterparts and with themselves. Hence, it could be suggested that intersecting identities as Black women influence how they negotiate their identities to adapt to aspects of school working conditions.

The experiences of the six women who negotiated their identity to adapt to sociocultural workplace norms can be understood through the lens of quasi-completed contracts. These imply temporary shifts to lessen conflict and discomfort and avoid stereotypes while also retaining their own cultural worldviews and behaviors. Regarding quasi-completed contracts, Jackson (2004) writes:

Quasi-completed cultural contracts are partly pre-negotiated and partly open for negotiation. These persons are not ready to fully co-create and not necessarily ruling out maintaining their own worldview. These persons “straddle the fence” in terms of their commitment to reorder privilege. They would rather maintain some measure of control. Arguably this is due to a perceived sense of vulnerability. (p. 6)

It may also be the case that these women participated in quasi-completed contracts and adapted their behavior because they felt their ethno-racial identities were not compatible with Western middle-class norms nor that the sociocultural aspect of working conditions reflected nor affirmed their cultural worldviews and behaviors. As such, working conditions were not conducive to signing co-created contracts because these are predicated by a sense of valuation despite cultural differences. As such, co-created contracts can only be developed in intercultural settings where the cultural
majority convey norms that imply “I am comfortable with you and value you for whom you are, and I am not interested in changing you in any way’’ (Jackson, 2002b, p. 49).

Theme #9: Pursuing Desired Ends

In addition to avoiding cultural stereotypes, the data revealed that participants negotiated their identities to achieve desired ends. Identity negotiation for the purpose of avoiding cultural stereotypes and pursuing desired ends are two intertwined yet distinct trends. In this section, participants described identity negotiating and adapting their use of rhetorical practices to achieve specific aims.

Ana and Jay perceived identity negotiation to be a tactic to facilitate interpersonal communication across the lines of ethno-racial difference. This was for the purpose of being understood and lessening cultural divides. Ana described how she would at times adapt her rhetoric with colleagues to “break down barriers”. She perceived that ethno-racial differences could lead to intercultural barriers and impede communication. As such, she admitted that she often shifted her language “to speak proper English” when interacting with her white colleagues to minimize confusion and ensure her ideas would be welcomed. However, she found that she didn’t need to shift her identities in this way with students. In fact, Ana described often incorporating her hometown colloquialisms when speaking with students, saying, “it's a way to build rapport with the kids.” In the same way, Ana described that “talking regular” led to relationship-building with her Black colleagues.

Like Ana, Jay described it was important to bridge communication gaps so that she could gain favor “with both sides… [by speaking in a way] they both can understand
and relate to.” In this quote, she implies that her rhetorical choices are guided by her audience. She was motivated by maintaining the comfort of interactants and by presenting herself in a way she perceived was familiar with them. She said, “if I speak the other way, they're either not going to understand, they're either going to get uncomfortable.” In this manner, Jay perceives rhetorical practices can be manipulated to foster inter-cultural commonality and understanding between the speaker and their audience.

Jackson (2002, 2004) suggests that rhetorical choices are indicative of contract types that occur in intercultural encounters. Consistent with the works of other communication scholars (Ting-Tooney & Dorjee, 1989), Jackson suggests that words accomplish more than express meaning; they communicate ideas, worldviews, and “values, norms, and beliefs” (Jackson, 2004, p. 9). As such, rhetorical choices by minoritized individuals may reflect adapting one’s worldview and behaviors to adapt to the norms of the cultural majority for the sake of seeming familiar and relatable. Guided by the lens of Cultural Contract Theory, such behavior may be interpreted as a negative attribute of quasi-completed contracts in terms of compromising aspects of their cultural worldview and behaviors through their rhetorical decisions. However, Ana and Jay’s actions may also be a sign of cultural fluidity. This interpretation complicates Jackson’s assumptions that quasi-completed contracts as a negative attribute that discredits the multi-dimensional ways in which minoritized communities utilize their agency in inter-cultural settings. It may be the case that participation in quasi-completed contracts may have positive connotations at times, may be evidence of one’s own agency, and occur apart from environmental pressures.
Participants revealed that adjusting their rhetoric practices had utility in advancing their professional needs. For example, albeit remorsefully, Jay explained that she negotiated her identity to gain favor with interactants, strengthen her professional relationships, and achieve her desired ends. She said:

What also makes this sad is knowing that based on how I interact with these people will determine if I can get what I need or what I want [such as] maintenance or purchase orders. It's very, very interesting how the way that I communicate with these people will determine the outcomes of things like that as well. I noticed that I get things immediately compared to my other [Black] colleagues because of those interactions with [white] people. It's just, it's just kind of crazy. It makes me feel bad; I shouldn't have to do this. I shouldn't have to do this. This shouldn't even really be a thing to happen. No one should treat someone differently based on how they interact with them.

Jay perceives that shifting her behavior can have a persuasive effect and led to having her material needs met. Although it is unjust, Jay perceived this works to her benefit. She also acknowledges that her Black colleagues do not participate in these implied agreements and finds herself intervening on their behalf. In this manner, she perceives that she is leveraging her favor for their betterment. She gave one such example:

When my Black colleagues realize that I'm code-switching, it's kind of funny because then they'll try to do things for their benefit as well. They will be like "Jay, can you do this or get Ms. Ruiz to do this or that? Because you know if we ask, they are going to say no." So, then I'll do it and it will happen because I did it.

Like Jay, Camile revealed that she often made strategic decisions to adapt her rhetoric for the purpose of achieving a desired end. She explained utilizing this strategy was helpful to land a job. She said:

I'm going to make sure that I use the right words, I [present] in a certain way just so I can get my foot in the door, right? It is a hard time decision because essentially what I'm trying to do is look like a respectable Negro to get in, which is what we shouldn't have to do. I should be able to walk in and say what I want to do, do what I want, and advance on the basis of my credentials and my ability to do the work. However, you and I both know that is not case.
Like Jay, Camile expresses a distaste for adapting her behaviors but perceived it as a strategic undertaking to satisfy the demands of the gatekeepers.

The stories revealed in this section add interesting nuance to how identity negotiation is understood in terms of how motivation to shift one’s identity and the expectations associated with this action. Jay conveyed that she shifted her behavior for the purpose of having her material needs met. She described these encounters as transactional; she observed that the outcomes are contingent on her decision-making to adapt her identity in a particular way instead of connected to her self-efficacy or inherent worthiness. As such, she complies with environmental pressure and blends in with the cultural majority for the purpose of gaining favor with others and getting her needs met. Similarly, Camile explained it was necessary to blend into the environment to get her “foot in the door”, a feat which she perceives could not be accomplished on her own merit. In their stories, Camile and Jay’s word choice signals a sense of reluctance and shame about negotiating their identities in this way. For example, Jay says it makes her “feel bad”. Likewise, Camile drew a parallel between her actions in that moment and the caricature of the “respectable Negro”, a term often associated with respectability politics (Harris, 2003). Of respectability politics, Harris writes:

The politics of respectability entailed "reform of individual behavior as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform." Respectability was part of "uplift politics," and had two audiences: African Americans, who were encouraged to be respectable, and white people, who needed to be shown that African Americans could be respectable. (p. 213)

Additionally, both appear to have regretted saying that they “shouldn’t have to” act in such a manner. Such word choice signals that Jay and Camile’s decision-making to shift their identities is different in these stories than in the others that were shared. It may be
the case as Camile suggests that they were acquiescing to perceived workplace norms regarding respectability. As Harris argues, the historical and sociopolitical implications of Black women’s intersecting identities may cause them to be more likely to employ respectability politics as well as be judged by them (p. 212).

Guided by Cultural Contract Theory, one may interpret that Jay and Camile’s noticeable regret in this moment signals that their decision-making to adapt their identities was diametrically opposed to their self-efficacy and self-sufficiency as qualified and competent Black professionals. As such, they may have perceived that they were not “straddling the fence” (quasi-completed contracts) but adapting to the cultural majority for the purpose of accomplishing a goal that they perceived they were unable to accomplish without assimilation (ready-to-sign contracts). At these moments, Camile and Jay may not have been fully aware of the implications of their identity negotiation. In fact, these transactions in which Camile got her job and Jay had her material needs met might have been very pleasant on the surface. However, both participants conveyed a significant emotional response as they reflected on these moments. This reflects the fact that ready-to-sign contracts may have the appearance of intercultural harmony, assimilationism may still heavily be resisted below the surface.

Like identity, identity negotiation and participation in different contract typologies are fluid. Jackson argues that commitment to one’s ethno-racial group (and the perceived cultural worldviews and behaviors of that group) influences the nature of identity negotiation. He suggests that cultural allegiance is directly proportional with one’s likelihood to adapt to the cultural majority and that fear of complete and utter assimilation may discourage participation. Additionally, Jackson argues that commitment
to one’s perceived ethno-racial group may also be proportional to perceived self-efficacy. In fact, the sense of vulnerability and dependency on the cultural majority may decrease over time, thus presenting the opportunity for the minoritized individuals to pull back from ready-to-sign contracts and engage in different contracts. This is evident in the case of Camile. She described differences in how she negotiated her identity over the course of her career. She stated that she still shifted her identity in the workplace, but now for different aims. She claimed that she no longer perceived it as necessary as she once did because she has grown to “love who [she] is, be secure in [her] own identity” and also knows that she is “smart as shit.” As a highly effective veteran teacher and highly respected by her colleagues, Camile was confident in her employment status; she no longer feared being let go as she did earlier in her career. As such, her reasons for identity negotiation shifted from concerns about job security and advocating for the betterment of staff and students. She said:

Because I have skin in the game and because I have a reputation… I have no problem saying what needs to be said, even if it makes people uncomfortable. Am I going to phrase it the right way? Obviously, but like the pleasantries that [came before] are no longer there.

Consequently, Cultural Contract Theory lends itself to distinguishing the differences between the types of contracts in which Camile participates in the workplace. She explained a change from ready-to-sign contracts to quasi-completed contracts by adapting her behavior as needed to lessen inter-cultural differences and be understood by white staff members for the purpose of advancing her goals without compromising her own self-worth.
Although many of the participants described shifting their identities and adapting their rhetoric and discursive practices in the workplace, they shared that there was risk involved in their participation. In fact, two participants shared experiences and opinions that contradicted their colleagues regarding identity negotiation in the workplace.

Annie feared the impact of identity negotiation if her students realized the ways in which she acted differently with school staff than her students. Although she admitted to shifting her identity, she did so with great caution. She said:

I try not to lose who I am, because who I am is what made these relationships with these kids. I don't want them to ever think that I'm a sellout or I'm just acting too good for them. I'm hoping … I’ll know when I've gone too far.

Mo indicated that shifting aspects of one’s identity may lead to assimilation and divorce from one’s cultural allegiance. She explained, “You can forget who you are as a person, your cultural importance, and what that brings to your profession, to whatever you do. And I've seen in time [and] time again.” Beyoncé also believed that there were additional physical costs to identity shifting. She said, “It can manifest in other ways, like stress or high blood pressure or anxiety, or you may get fired and then you have financial issues.” These fears are consistent with those of Dickens and Chavez (2018) who found that Black women drew clear boundaries around identity negotiation in the workplace due to trepidation about compromising their integrity, loss of cultural worldview, and linguistic assimilation.

Beyoncé was one of two teachers in this study whose stories and experiences contradicted the theme of negotiating one’s identity to adapt to the sociocultural context.
of urban schools. While Camile expressed shifting her identity at one point for the purpose of securing employment, Beyoncé explained that she does not feel this same sense of vulnerability about obtaining or keeping a job. As a dual certified STEM and special education teacher, she expresses that her job needs her more than she is reliant on her employers for a sustainable income. While Camile felt compelled at one point to acquiesce to get her foot in the door, Beyoncé explained, “I feel very empowered. Even if you fire me tomorrow. Well, I'm going to get another job, so there's no fear there about anything Eurocentric negatively impacting me.” This difference in Camile and Beyoncé’s sentiments could be linked to individual differences in personality; it could also be linked to disparities in vacancies for dual certified educators or differences in the demand for STEM versus social studies educators.

Like Beyoncé, Omi’s decision-making in reference to identity negotiation did not align with the six participants who adapted to their schools’ sociocultural norms. Also, Omi is the only participant in this study who worked in a school with majority Black children, Black teachers, and Black leaders. Omi also stated that she did not see identity shifting as compatible with her personality. She said:

I think it's an innate thing to have that ability, and I just don't have it. It's just not in me to try to be different, to appease someone else if I'm not doing anything wrong to that person. I've just always felt like, what if I didn't do anything wrong? I don't need to change anything because you want me too.

In this excerpt, Omi reveals that she resists the sociocultural demands to align herself with the dominant racial group (who she signals by saying “you”). Additionally, Omi does not see her resistance as risky. She said:

[I’ve] never suffered consequences. I always kind of been covered in that way…I never gave myself the space or option to be more professional in that way.
To understand these contradictions, it may be the case that elements of valuation may lend themselves to a different choice in respect to identity negotiation. Dickens and Chavez (2018) write that token Black women who feel racially isolated or pressured to perform in the workplace may take on identity shifting to decrease hyper-visibility. Alternatively, Black women who do not feel such external pressures may not need to adapt their behaviors to fit in. This aligns with how Beyoncé characterized herself. She described herself as always feeling empowered; even as a child, she described not seeking her family’s validation for her accomplishments because she had a deep sense of pride and satisfaction in her own efforts. To further illustrate this point, Beyoncé described that she recently bought herself a balloon to acknowledge and celebrate her diligent efforts at work during a particularly challenging season. It may be the case that Beyoncé doesn’t shift her identity because she doesn't see herself as being coerced or needing to adapt for the sake of survival. In other words, she doesn’t perceive any risk and therefore no need to compromise any elements of how she presents herself in the world. Regarding Omi, it may be the case that the socio-cultural dynamics of her African-centered school require a different type of contract with its teachers. In other words, Omi is not regularly engaging in inter-cultural encounters nor is she racially isolated. As such, she may not need to shift her identities to achieve desired ends. However, it is possible that there are ways in which she shifts her identity; however, this decision-making may occur in relation to other aspects of sociocultural norms unrelated to ethno-racial difference. These may instead be rooted in social class, gender identity or expression, or other aspects of identity.
Participant narratives revealed that they understood identity negotiation and adapting their identities in the workplace as distinct from professionalism. Instead, they perceived professionalism as communicated by sociocultural and organizational working conditions undergirded by Eurocentric norms. Due to their strong commitment and meaning-making about their identities as self-identified Black women, participants resisted these implicit demands in their current and former places of work and sought to redefine what it meant to be professional Black women teachers.

Participants defined professionalism in terms of job-related competency, soft skills (e.g., problem-solving, adaptability, positivity), a sense of moral obligation to students and their families’ wellbeing, and appropriate behavior (e.g., abstaining from cursing or foul language). Participants agreed that these behaviors should be directed to school stakeholders regardless of ethnic, racial, and gender background. Notably, participants agreed their interactions with school leaders (e.g., principals, assistant principals, etc.) also necessitated professionalism and respect; however, this did not always imply adjusting one’s behavior to mitigate ethno-racial or gender difference. However, participants believed that this definition was unshared by their school. For instance, Omi worked at several schools throughout her career and theorized that:

Professionalism is rooted in like white culture. It's not that it is generally professional, it's just they feel like this is what's proper so that's what is coined as ‘professional’.

Drawing on her professional experiences, Omi described implicit messages conveyed about ‘professionalism’ were communicated through organizational expectations for hair. Organizational conditions are defined by said and unsaid elements of school culture,
professional expectations and responsibilities, and accountability structures (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Sebastian et al., 2019; Thoonen et al., 2011). Omi explained how a prior job had written expectations for staff members to maintain “neat hair”. Omi believed this was a culturally biased organizational expectation for workers grounded in Eurocentric beauty standards and an extension of a larger sociohistorical tradition of Western imperialism on Black women’s aesthetic choices (Jha, 2015). In fact, she perceived that the subtext of this policy rewarded whiteness, a premise that is consistent with scholars’ observations of the unspoken and unwritten hidden curriculum of K-12 schooling that reflects and reproduces social hierarchies at the detriment of minoritized and low-income communities (Dwayne, 2020). Instead, she pushed back and chose to wear her hair naturally. She described that of the Black staff in that school, she was “the only natural person at the time.” By choosing to be natural, Omi engaged in an act of resistance against the organizational aspect of working conditions and ideological hegemony of what counts as “neat hair”; instead, she articulated her own self-defined standpoint and agency to “to freely participate in all things Black” as she said. Unlike women who may “modify their appearance…to neutralize culturally based assumptions associated with their gendered racial groups” (Dickens & Chavez, 2018), it may be the case that Omi chooses not to do so because she does not fear scrutiny or negative repercussions from her actions. As mentioned in the preceding section, Omi sees herself as “covered” and not having faced consequences for her resistance.

Omi described that Eurocentric organizational demands were also mediated through the school’s dress code policy and subjected her body to surveillance and scrutiny. She gave an example of how this manifested in her previous workplace:
I'm not a skinny girl. I'm not a straight-up-and-down girl. I've even been talked to at my former school about certain things I might wear. Even though somebody can wear the same exact thing as me, but because I am made a different way, I get told that I can’t wear it and that’s just off body type. It’s not fair either because once again, it’s cultural. Of course, there are white women that have curves, but like not generally. So that's another thing that's specific to culture that has nothing to do with being professional. Meanwhile, it’s like the way you are naturally made and walking around is not professional so it’s on you to figure out a way to cover it up or fix it so everybody else is comfortable.

Elsewhere, Eurocentrism has been theorized as a vehicle of white supremacy; the process by which social, political, and economic privilege is granted based on racial group membership for the purpose of “protect[ing] entrenched power” (Harris, 1993, p. 1709). Omi described that she is inherently disadvantaged by these policies through her body’s natural curves. Omi’s experiences support evidence from previous observations regarding the prominence of the white gaze on women teachers of color in the workplace (e.g., Kohli, 2018; Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Although dress codes are a commonplace organizational norm in certain professions, the double marginalization of racism and sexism taken together with historical treatment of Black women’s bodies shaped how Omi uniquely experienced and related to organizational mandates regarding her clothing. This may not be the case for every Black woman, but certainly reflects Omi’s epistemological standpoint.

Jackson (2002) writes that marginalized group members whose cultural differences are unaffirmed in inter-cultural settings “must make a choice to resist assimilation and maybe a certain measure of life satisfaction or to sign that ready-to-sign contract in the absence of mutual validation” (p. 363). This lends itself to understanding the costs of resistance. Additionally, decreased satisfaction may have also been an additional factor undergirding her decision-making to leave her school after the micro-
aggressive encounter with her school leaders and the white male parent. In contrast, Omi felt the school working conditions were consistent with her own conceptualization of professionalism as well as how she saw herself as a “culturally biased” Black woman. At the African-centered school, she often wore shirts with social justice messaging and her hairstyle choices were not restricted by workplace expectations. In fact, she articulated that at the time of the final interview, she wore braids that reached to the back of her knees, a style that would have not been allowed at her previous school. Additionally, her school commemorated “Wrap It Wednesdays” in which students and teachers were encouraged to wear headwraps in acknowledgement of this significant global cultural symbol among members of the African diaspora (Willson, 2022).

Mo and Ana also perceived that conceptualization of professionalism in the workplace contradicted the ways in which they defined and expressed themselves as Black women. While Omi experienced opposition through written organizational expectations, Mo, Annie, and Ana described how Eurocentric standards of professionalism were mediated through unwritten sociocultural dynamics in predominantly white schools. For instance, Mo found that she felt compelled to “speak a certain way” to be considered a professional in her new school where she was one of few Black teachers. She felt this pressure even outside of social interactions with white colleagues. She expressed her frustration:

> Sometimes I'm a bit annoyed because I have to do it, or I feel like I have to do it. Sometimes I get like.... Just like, damn, I gotta do this shit or why do I have to speak a specific, certain way? Like, why are Ebonics such a horrible way to view a language or dialect, you know? I mean, I don't use them all the time. It is not my regular vocabulary. However, I know lots of people at my job who do and feel comfortable doing that. We should all be made to feel comfortable speaking in our regular colloquialisms.
In this excerpt, Mo expressed her anger towards the unstated understanding that vernaculars outside of standard American English are not suited in the workplace nor deemed ‘professional’. Mo’s remarks reveal that she believes the school’s sociocultural norms do not affirm linguistic diversity. She also internalizes opposition to linguistic diversity as a threat to her personal agency and decision-making about how she chooses to express herself. Echoing Mo’s sentiments, Ana describes “proper English” as an unwritten organizational norm in her school. She describes how this norm is often front and center in her thinking and actively must remind herself to resist this Eurocentric interpretation of professionalism. She told a story about the last time this pressure came to mind as she was teaching in another teacher’s classroom:

There is a white teacher in the back of the room- because that's her room, I'm going into her room as a teacher- and at first, I was feeling a little self-conscious. I wondered- is this professional for me to talk this way? But then I had to remind myself: I already have experience under my belt, I know what it is that I'm doing. I must be confident enough to be able to teach it, but also be able to like talk in this manner with kids, because this is how we can understand each other. Of course, when it comes to vocabulary, we need to teach that the proper way. But when it comes to having conversation with kids, I'm not going to change the way that I speak because it's not natural to me.

In this excerpt, the presence of Ana’s white co-worker is a physical reminder of how professionalism is associated with speaking in a certain way that does not align with Ana’s preferred cultural form of expression based on her ethno-racial heritage, cultural upbringing, and the regional colloquialisms of her hometown. Ana resists this aspect of school working conditions, exerting emotional labor to remind herself that her rhetorical practices do not make her less professional; rather, these are assets that allow her to differentiate “how knowledge is presented and shared” and positively influence her students (White, 2018, p. 30). These sentiments are consistent with other identity
negotiation literature. Works by Shih et al. (2013) and Hall et al. (2012) suggest that organizational cues alert members of minoritized groups to determine the types of identity shifting that may be implicitly demanded in a particular environment. The pressure to adhere to different sets of- and at times, conflicting- organizational cues is characterized as living in “two worlds” and can have psychological and physical effects such as stress, weight gain, hair loss, and sleeplessness to name a few (Hall et al., 2012).

Similarly, Annie expressed how unwritten norms- specifically regarding the way professionalism was defined and enacted- were inconsistent with how she self-defined her Black womanhood in terms of “not backing down from your identity to make somebody else feel comfortable.” Since Annie was the only Black women teacher in her school, she described that she struggled with redefining professionalism in a way that complimented how she perceived her assets as a Black woman. She felt conflicted since her only professional role models at her school were white school leaders who had provided mentorship earlier during her career. She said:

I don't really have a [Black] role model. So, when I'm seeing other people who are older than me that are not from my culture and they're acting a certain way, I'm like, you guys got your life together. The way that you talk is just so, you know, it's so well spoken, and I feel like you just bring on an air of power and respect, and people just feel like they have to respect you because of the way you present yourself.

Annie shared in the last interview that she aspired to move into administration. She desired to manifest this goal by beginning to dress for the role she envisioned but also wondered the extent to which this was an attainable goal since she worked that she may not be regarded as professional as the white leaders in her school. She described, however, that it was very hard to “turn off [her] upbringing.” At the same time, Annie expressed “it's hard for me to turn who I genuinely and authentically am” and thus was
perplexed with how to present herself in the workplace that was consistent with her self-definition as a Black woman. It may be the case that Annie’s sentiments are shaped by the fact that she is the only Black woman teacher in her school. Although members of her school’s disciplinary staff are Black, Annie’s sense of vulnerability may stem from a sense of racial isolation and hyper-visibility due to her gendered racial group. Dickens and Chavez (2018) hypothesize that “token status in predominantly white work environments creates pressure to modify their behavior” (p. 154). Taken together with her desire to pursue a principalship in the future, it may be that her career aspirations heightened the pressure she felt to align herself to the cultural majority at her school.

The third research question asked: how do ethnic, racial, and gender identities influence how Black women teachers negotiate their identities to adapt to working conditions in urban schools? In response, data from this study revealed that Black women teachers resisted Eurocentric conceptualization of professionalism mediated through school organization and sociocultural aspects of school working conditions. This theme conveys the ways in which participants resisted the implicit social stratification that privileged white bodies and ways of being and de-valued other non-dominant identities (Jackson, 2002, 2004; White, 2018). With the exception of Omi and the African-centered school where she presently works, hints of cross-cultural valuation and inclusivity are absent from participants’ representations of school working conditions. Instead, there is unsaid pressure mediated through sociocultural and organizational norms to assimilate to the dominant culture in the workplace in ways that contradicts with how participants in this study represent their standpoint and self-definition as Black women teachers (Jackson, 2002, 2004). It can be hypothesized that these oppositional views on
professionalism reflect how identity and cultural politics manifest in schools, leading them to be “sites of struggle” with specific implications for teachers who come from minoritized communities (White, 2018, p. 18).

Summary

The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to interrogate ethno-racial and gender identities as factors shaping aspects of Black women’s pedagogy, professional experiences, and decision-making in urban schools. Participants included eight self-identified Black women of the African diaspora who worked in urban schools with predominantly Black and Latino students. This study introduced ethno-racial heterogeneity as an important dimension of identity when exploring the lived experiences of Black women teachers in urban schools. Through their stories, participants shared the ways in which the intersection of their identities influenced how they approached their pedagogical decisions, encountered micro-aggressions moderated through interactions with white staff members, yet also experienced uplift in community with Black colleagues. Participants also described making strategic decisions to negotiate their identities in response to sociocultural and organization aspects of working conditions and sought to redefine professionalism to reflect and affirm diverse identities.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter is organized in the following manner. First, an overview is given regarding the research findings. Next, study limitations are discussed as well as implications for theory and scholarship. Then, recommendations are provided for research, practice, and policy. This chapter concludes with my final reflections.

Summary

This section outlines each of the three research questions guiding this narrative inquiry study and the ten themes that emerged from data analysis. Table 1 also lists these research questions and corresponding themes.

Table 4: Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Themes</th>
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<tr>
<td>RQ #1: How do self-identified Black women teachers explain ethno-racial and gender identities as factors influencing their pedagogical decisions?</td>
<td>1. Supplementing curriculum with counter-narratives and role models</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Facilitating conversations about race-related current events</td>
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<td>3. Teaching the truth about American history</td>
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<td>4. Guiding students to navigate a racialized society</td>
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<td>RQ 2: How do the ethno-racial and gender identities of self-identified Black women influence workplace interactions and relationships with colleagues and school leaders?</td>
<td>5. Experiencing micro-aggressions in interracial interactions</td>
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<td>7. Participating in supportive intra-racial relationships</td>
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RQ3: How do ethno-racial and gender identities influence how Black women teachers negotiate their identities to adapt to working conditions in urban schools?

8. Avoiding gendered racial stereotypes
9. Pursuing desired ends
10. Redefining professionalism

Summary of Themes: Research Question One

The first research question asks, "how do self-identified Black women teachers explain ethno-racial and gender identities as factors influencing their pedagogical decisions?" The data revealed four themes, which are summarized in this next section.

Theme #1: Supplementing Curriculum with Counternarratives and Role Models

First, participant narratives reveal decision-making to supplement school curriculum with counter-narratives and role models to convey positive portrayals of Black people and other communities of color that mirrored the ethno-racial backgrounds of their students. Undergirding participants' decision-making was the belief that the curriculum was not always relevant to their students; therefore, they supplemented the curriculum to positively influence students’ racial identities, draw attention to exceptional historical figures, and challenge the implied inferiority of communities of color.

Theme #2: Facilitating Conversations About Race-Related Current Events

Participants facilitated classroom conversations with students about race-related current events. The term "race-related current events" in this section explains the nature of hyper-visible police brutality in 2020, racially motivated killings, and the spillover effect of civil unrest that followed. When asked how the murders of Ahmaud Arbery,
George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor among others influenced their pedagogy, seven out of eight participants gave specific examples of how it shaped their decision-making. Of the seven who engaged in these conversations, none of the teachers were trained to do so. Additionally, only two teachers facilitated these conversations with the endorsement of their schools; the remaining five participants broached these topics because they wanted to give students space to ask questions, share concerns, and understand the details of these events. Although participants described that their teaching broached current events prior to 2020, the sociopolitical climate and media coverage of race-related events in 2020 was a unique turning point for them in how they addressed these issues in their classroom through their pedagogy.

Theme #3: Teaching the Truth about American History

Participants conveyed a self-imposed commitment to teaching the truth about American history. This theme was unexpected largely because only three out of eight participants were employed as social studies teachers. Although Ana, Omi, and other participants did not teach social studies, they still shared stories in which they challenged dominant historical narratives in their classroom. One such example that was popular among participants was the teaching of America's founding and repudiating claims of Christopher Columbus's role as a noble explorer. These claims overlook the fact that these lands that would be North America were already inhabited. These claims also overlook the mass genocide of the indigenous population at the hands of European settlers (Loewen, 2008). In addition to correcting inaccurate misrepresentations of this nation's history, participants explained that teaching the truth about American history
helped students' make sense of current events. They also explained that teaching inaccurate representations of American history was an injustice to their predominantly Black and Latino students.

**Theme #4: Guiding Students to Navigate a Racialized Society**

Another theme that emerged from data analysis was participants' guidance of students to navigate a racialized society. Consistent with Black Feminist literature on *other-mothering* and emancipatory pedagogies (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1997; Duncan, 2020; Ramsey, 2012), participants' imparted strategies moderated through classroom instruction to foster students' awareness of their physical safety and wellbeing. In doing so, participants used developmentally appropriate strategies across all grade bands.

Additionally, some participants revealed concern for their students' safety and wellbeing in school when engaging across the lines of ethno-racial difference with other school staff. This awareness reflects participants' embodied wisdom and standpoint that schools, like society, are places in which minoritized youth may be subjected to objectification, surveillance, and adultification (Morris, 2016; Rios, 2011).

**Summary of Themes: Research Question Two**

The second research question asks "how do the ethno-racial and gender identities of self-identified Black women influence workplace interactions and relationships with colleagues and school leaders?" Three themes emerged from the data related to this research question. Each of these are explained briefly in this next section.
**Theme #5: Experiencing Micro-aggressions Within the Context of Interracial Interactions**

Participants experienced different types of racial micro-aggressions within the context of interracial interactions with non-Black colleagues and school leaders, including micro-assaults, micro-insults, and micro-invalidations. Mediated through these types of micro-aggressions, participants expressed receiving demeaning messages about their racial group membership as Black women, including slights intended to undercut their professional expertise, qualifications, achievements, and their ability to contribute to their school community beyond the role of disciplinarian. Notably, these experiences of gendered racial harm were disregarded by school leaders when brought to their attention. Perhaps not surprisingly, Camile and Omi described gendered racial micro-aggressions were turning points in their professional careers and factored into their decision-making to leave their school.

**Theme #6: Disengaging from Diversity Initiatives**

Participants shared that they were disengaged with the diversity initiatives at their school sites for several reasons. First, diversity initiatives overlooked the complexity of identities and the ways in which social location shaped access to privilege, power, and marginalization within the U.S. matrix of domination (Alinia, 2015). Second, participants also perceived these initiatives did not uproot structural inequalities reflected in school processes. Additionally, participants explained that adult behaviors- including lack of trust, white fragility, and lack of meaningful follow up- undermined the efficacy of these initiatives.
**Theme #7: Participating in Supportive Intra-Racial Relationships**

Data revealed that self-identified Black women in this study participated in supportive intra-racial relationships with other Black educators in their schools. These supportive relationships were indelible to combatting racial isolation and navigating workplace dynamics. Participants also spoke about the significant influence of other Black women, bonding over shared interests and shared experiences (Johnson, 2015). For some participants, these bonds lent themselves to metaphorical "safe spaces", bolstering their ability to buffer gendered racial micro-aggressions and engage in mutual uplift (Dunmeyer, 2020).

One interesting contradiction emerged from some participants' experiences. Some participants experienced instances of horizontal hostility (Ingram et al., 2014). These came in the form of intra-racial colorism and ethnic stereotyping from other Black teachers. Altogether, these took the form of intra-racial micro-aggressions, which are under-explored in teacher diversity scholarship.

Another unanticipated element that surfaced from data analysis was the nature of intra-racial and cross-gender dynamics between the participants and their school leaders. Of the eight participants in this study, three women had Black male leaders at some point during data collection. Overall, their depictions of leadership behaviors and influence on their professional experiences were not positive. For instance, Mo attributed her decision-making to switch schools to dissatisfaction with her principal as she claimed that his leadership was callous and lacked integrity. Camile perceived that her school leader demonstrated a lack of sensitivity and advocacy for issues related to racial justice. This discrepant data reifies the significance of social location and overlapping identities that
enact different standpoints and lived experiences among and within communities of color.

Summary of Themes: Research Question Three

The third research question asks, "*how do ethno-racial and gender identities influence how Black women teachers negotiate their identities to adapt to working conditions in urban schools?*” The data revealed three themes related to this final research question.

*Theme #8: Avoiding Gendered Racial Stereotypes*

Six out of eight participants explained identity negotiation or *shifting* their identities to buffer against gendered racial stereotypes. A concept drawn from communication theory, identity negotiation describes the “conscious and mindful shifts" of one's behaviors, worldview, and values away from one's indigenous cultural patterns to align with the dominant culture. In the context of African American identity, negotiations of identities are purposeful compromises that move one away from AA culture towards dominant culture (Jackson, 2002). These six participants, all of whom worked in pre-dominantly white schools, shifted their identities by adjusting their language, tone, and mannerisms in interactions with non-Black colleagues to manage perceptions across the lines of ethno-racial difference and avoid implicit associations such as "the angry Black woman" and the "strong Black woman".
Theme #9: Pursuing Desired Ends

Six of eight participants described shifting their identities as a tactical measure to pursue desired ends. Whereas the previous theme focused on identity negotiation for the purpose of avoiding gendered racial stereotypes, this theme conveys the way participants adapted their rhetoric to advance their personal agendas in the workplace. In total, participants explained two reasons to identity shift: bridge cultural gaps (e.g., facilitating cross-cultural conversation and lessening cultural divides) and meeting professional needs (e.g., obtaining favor, gaining physical or material goods). Discrepant data also revealed that two participants did not feel the need to shift their identities in this way. A longer analysis of their experiences will be discussed in the “Implications” section of this chapter.

Theme #10: Redefining Professionalism

Each of the eight participants rejected how professionalism emanated school organizational and sociocultural conditions. Additionally, participants perceived the way professionalism was defined and operationalized in their workplace differed from the mindset and behaviors they thought were critical to be effective classroom teachers in urban schools. For example, participants conveyed professionalism to involve job-related competency, soft skills (e.g., positivity, problem-solving), commitment to students, and role model behavior. However, they explained that written organizational expectations such as professional dress and hair codes were incompatible with the natural make up of their bodies as self-defined Black women of the African diaspora.
Participants also perceived unwritten norms regarding language were a gatekeeper for professionalism. Although participants described adapting their rhetoric choices to pursue desired ends, data revealed that participants perceived that Standard American English was the unspoken standard for how knowledge was to be constructed, conveyed, and transacted in the school (Delpit, 1988; see also Baker-Bell, 2020). In other words, participants perceived that linguistic diversity was not affirmed in the workplace. The only exception was the case in which Ana worked at the dual language school, whose emphasis on Spanish-English bilingualism was one of the primary organizational traits that drew her to that school.

Participants in this study sought to redefine professionalism on their own terms as Black women. Some even enacted resistance against organizational and sociocultural norms that amplified Eurocentric and white Western middle-class values. Despite this and other acts of resistance, participants' overarching sense was that school working conditions were not culturally affirming nor inclusive of their ethno-racial and gender identities.

Limitations

Although the findings of this study contribute to the literature regarding teacher diversity, including the professional experiences and decision-making of Black women, there are some limitations. In this section, I will discuss three limitations: participant selection, distractions during Zoom interviews, and the absence of field texts.

In the dissertation proposal, I conveyed an interest in recruiting a participant sample that represented a range of grade bands, years of experience, unique employment
sites, and school types. The purpose of selecting a diverse participant sample was to
address gaps by previous studies in the research base. Namely, recent studies on self-
identified Black women, including works by White (2018) and Stanley (2020) are
focused exclusively in public settings or charter settings. Additionally, findings by White
(2020) suggest that self-identified Black teachers indicate higher levels of satisfaction in
public schools than charter schools (with the assumption that this is tied to union
representation and influence on aspects of school working conditions). Also, I hoped to
have at least 50% of the participants have at least 10 years of experience or more to
determine to what extent, if at all, veteran classroom teachers perceived their experiences
in urban schools differently than teachers nascent in their careers. This present study
draws disproportionately from teachers in the charter section (n=6) as well as teachers
with less than 10 years of experience (n=5). Although I interviewed additional public
school teachers and women with more years of classroom experience, they were excluded
because they did not consistently meet all the eligibility criteria throughout the duration
of the study. While their stories would have enhanced this research, many of their
experiences aligned with the findings explained here.

Due to the stay-at-home orders during the Covid-19 pandemic and regional
diversity of participants, I selected Zoom to facilitate video interviews with participants
as it is a fairly user-friendly and familiar platform for many people. At times, however,
distractions and technology issues interfered with the quality of the interviews. Although
most of the participants were seated in a quiet room and fully engaged during the
interviews, there were times in which participants engaged in Zoom interviews while
driving, watching children, or other types of multi-tasking. At times, background noise or
faulty internet interrupted our conversations. Altogether, I do not think these factors greatly impacted the data as participants seemed to re-engage quickly. There was one instance, however, when I interviewed someone while she was on vacation, and I do believe that other people in the room present at the time did impact the quality of the stories shared. I was unaware until after the interview started that the participant was on vacation with a male friend and although I proposed re-scheduling, she did not want to do so. Then, halfway through the interview, the friend entered the room and stayed (or I suspect) for the remainder of the interview. After his entry, the participant seemed to be less engaged. Although we did finish all the questions, I cannot help but wonder if the presence of a third party in the room impacted the quality of the interview. That said, it was the third interview and I had already spent nearly 2 ½ hours gathering insightful stories in the first two interviews.

The third limitation was the absence of field texts. In the dissertation proposal, I conveyed an interest in collecting curriculum samples from participants to add context about the expectations for teaching and learning at their schools. Although participants self-selected to share some materials, I did not explicitly request field texts for several reasons. First, participants graciously volunteered hours of their time to interviews. Although I only anticipated interviews to span 60 to 120 minutes, there were some participants who expressed the desire to talk for longer periods of time. They were motivated by the purpose behind the research and believed that sharing their stories could have a positive impact on research and practice. Also, many of the participants expressed that it was therapeutic to share their stories with me. Second, participants were greatly fatigued. Although they welcomed the opportunity to talk, it was obvious that teaching
during overlapping pandemics had impacted them personally and professionally. As such, I did not want to put an additional burden on them nor their time by asking them to find and send instructional materials. Instead, I posed questions to learn about the types of curricula they used. I also posed questions about the extent to which standardized testing and scripted curriculum were factors that contributed to their professional experiences and decision-making. Also, I think asking questions yielded better data instead of attempting to draw conclusions from isolated lesson plans without fuller context.

Implications

This study seeks to extend teacher diversity scholarship by exploring intersectionality and identity negotiation as factors shaping the professional experiences and decision-making of teachers of color. In this next section, I will discuss the implications of this study for scholarship and how findings are situated within the larger body of literature. First, implications will be discussed as it relates to turnover among teachers of color. Then implications will be discussed regarding the professional experiences and decision-making of teachers of color related to structural, organization, and sociocultural aspects of school working conditions.

Literature Related to Turnover Among Teachers of Color

This study is situated in a larger social problem of ethno-racial imparity between teachers and the students they serve. Although turnover was not the primary focus of the research questions, a discussion of teacher turnover is included in the literature review.
and merits some brief discussion here. Altogether, participants’ stories and several themes from this present study are helpful to gain a deeper understanding of this issue.

As discussed in the literature review, there are two primary bodies of literature that explain the root causes of the lack of ethno-racial diversity in the teacher workforce. These arguments are *the leaky pipeline* and *the revolving door*. The design of this study is inadequate to evaluate the first argument. Namely, investigation of *the leaky pipeline* argument requires a detailed examination of pre-service teacher pipeline and how various factors such as enrollment into a teacher education program, graduation, and certification and how these are experienced by candidates of color. Conversely, data from this study reveals insight as to the latter phenomenon, *the revolving door*. This phrase is used to characterize the disproportional rates of departure among teachers of color in comparison to rates of entry to teaching. *The revolving door* also signals that turnover among teachers of color is higher proportionally than the exit of white teachers from the field of education. Turnover is described in the literature in terms of the following actions:

- "Movers" who switch schools (Ingersoll, 2001b; Leukens et al., 2004; Marvel et al., 2007; White, 2018),
- "Leavers" who move from teaching into another career (Ingersoll, 2001b; Johnson et al., 2005),
- "Returners" or those who leave teaching temporarily and return (Penlington, 2002).
Two elements of this study reveal insight to *the leaky pipeline*. The first element is participant selection. Eleven women participated in all parts of data collections (e.g., completion of demographic survey, open-ended questions, and three semi-structured interviews). However, three of these women were not included in this present study due to voluntary and involuntary turnover. Namely, one teacher voluntary moved from her position as a classroom teacher to a higher-ranked position as a district coach. The remaining teachers experienced involuntary turnover as one teacher’s position was dissolved, and the other was unable to teach after a cross-country move to a new state that did not have certification reciprocity with her home state.

The second element was analysis of participant employment history as revealed by demographic surveys and multiple interviews. Of the eight participants, only 25% (n = 2) remained in the same school throughout the duration of the teaching career. These two were Annie and Camile. However, Camile admitted that she had already decided to submit a letter of resignation at the end of the school year. Annie had recently received a promotion and did not anticipate leaving teaching any time soon. The discrepancy in their decision-making to stay in their schools might be attributed to differences in years of experience or opportunities for professional advancement outside of the classroom. These are both consistent with prior findings regarding teacher pay, advancement opportunities, and retention (Farinde, 2016). Additionally, Camile conveyed that she had already planned her exit out of her school, however, she was waiting to graduate from law school before making the career shift.

50% of participants (n = 4) participated in voluntary and involuntary employment changes between the first and third interviews. Ana and Mo voluntarily switched schools.
They attributed their decision-making to do so based on dissatisfaction with elements of school working conditions, including dissatisfaction with school leadership and racial-microaggressions with colleagues. Regarding involuntary turnover, Jay's position was eliminated but she was invited to move into another vacant position in the same department. Of the eight participants, Jannell was the only teacher whose contract was not renewed for the following year. She attributed her dismissal to repeated lack of success as an ELA teacher, a position in which she was not certified and did not have experience. Despite numerous attempts to self-advocate for instructional support, she was not invited back. However, a social studies teacher at the school quit over the summer so she was offered an opportunity to fill that position. Jay and Mo’s involuntary employment decisions support previous research regarding employment instability in urban schools as a factor disproportionately impacting teachers of color (Brummet, 2014; Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond; 2017). Their experiences with involuntary turnover may be explained by the fact that lay-offs, school closings, and funding inequalities are more likely to impact employment opportunities in urban schools than other school types (White, 2018). However, these involuntary forms of turnover still present an important consideration for diversifying the teacher workforce and addressing root causes of the revolving door. It may also be of importance to disaggregate types of teacher turnover (e.g., mover, leaver, etc.) when examining teacher departure rates by ethno-racial group and gender.

When asked to share the reasons undergirding voluntary turnover decisions, participants described dissatisfaction with aspects of working conditions and school leadership. Their experiences agree with the findings of prior studies which showed
teachers of color indicate job dissatisfaction as the primary reason for turnover (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015; Ingersoll et al., 2017). Participants varied in terms of the reasons undergirding their job dissatisfaction. For instance, Ana, Camile, and Omi all indicated turning points incidents of gendered and/or racial micro-aggressions in school contexts that factor their decision-making to leave their schools. This was not the case for all turnover decisions. For example, Mo left her school because of poor leadership that she perceived created hostile conditions for teachers and students. On the other hand, Omi was actively applying to other jobs and hoping to leave her school due to dissatisfaction with school leadership; however, she did not explain identity as a factor contributing to her desire to leave teaching. Additionally, Beyoncé was also planning to leave at the end of the year, but also for reasons unrelated to her identity. Altogether, this trend among participants raises intriguing questions regarding the nature and extent of micro-aggressions and other forms of mistreatment by school leadership and colleagues as factors shaping job dissatisfaction Although not generalizable, participants’ experiences reveal a deeper layer of insight related to factors that link job dissatisfaction and turnover as well as the ways in which gendered and racial socialization shapes decision-making to leave their schools.

Structural Aspect of School Working Conditions

As defined in the literature review chapter, the structural aspect of school working conditions are determined by characteristics such as school type, founder, stability of student body, enrollment, funding, involvement of external stakeholders (e.g., private donors), location, hiring and staffing model, and unionization (Bryk et al., 2002;
Newman & Wehlage, 1995; Tondeur et al., 2009; White, 2018). A growing body of literature suggests that neoliberal and marketized practices such as high-stakes testing, performance-based evaluations, and standardized curriculum are linked with turnover among teachers of color (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012; Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018; Sleeter, 2017; White, 2018). However, participants held contradictory perspectives about these topics. Low salaries and minimal opportunities for professional advancement are also structural conditions conveyed to erode workplace satisfaction (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018); yet participants did not convey consistent opinions or experiences related to these. Only one factor seemed to be consistent: participant disengagement from diversity initiatives.

Teacher diversity literature describes many school policies and practices may assert progressive values yet reinforce the racial status quo (Kohli, 2018; Milner, 2008). Among this includes diversity initiatives that undermine expressed commitment to equity and racial justice. For example, the results of this study indicate that the self-identified Black women participants disengaged from initiatives implemented in their school. They perceived these initiatives over-simplified the complexity of overlapping identities and the significance of positionality. Participants also agreed that adult dynamics in the building did not provide a solid foundation for these expressed priorities to become woven into the fabric of the school community. These findings appear to be consistent with prior studies indicating that initiatives intended to attract and retain teachers of color often fail to challenge issues related to implicit associations, micro-aggressive encounters, and gendered racism in the schools (Burns-Thomas, 2020; Farinde et al., 2017; Kohli, 2019). Although some studies suggest that professional learning topics
related to issues of equity and inclusion are appealing to teachers of color (Mason et al., 2021), these present findings suggest the way initiatives are implemented are of critical importance to teachers of color. Guided by participants’ experiences, it could conceivably be hypothesized that exemplar diversity initiatives should be meaningfully integrated with other school priorities and lead to observable changes to staff dynamics with each other and students. Despite the insight revealed by these findings, questions remain.

*Organizational Aspect of School Working Conditions*

Simply put, organizational conditions are often set in motion by policy and practices set by school leaders and shaped by interpersonal staff dynamics. Prior research has highlighted the extent to which perception of leadership practices, including dissemination of support, promoting teacher agency, foster non-threatening climate, and care factor into retention of teachers of color (Achinstein et al. 2010; Dixon et al., 2019; Evans & Leonard, 2013; Mason et al., 2021). Conversely, multiple studies indicate varying types of mistreatments erode teacher-leader relationship and leads to turnover (Blase and Blase, 2003; Bridwell, 2012; Grooms et al., 2021). Prior studies on Black women teachers' relationships with school leaders also focus on the ways in which women experience threats, surveillance, and limited autonomy. Recent works by Johnson (2020) and Milner (2020) also indicate Black women often experience tokenism in the workplace, expected to comply with leadership, and may be confronted with stereotyping or micro-aggressions when they exert their agency (Johnson, 2020; Milner, 2020). These present findings add to these studies by also exploring the ways in which women utilize a variety of strategies to mitigate and resist gendered racialization. Additional research has
demonstrated ethno-racial match between teachers of color and leaders of color also contributes to retention (Bartenan & Grissom, 2019). In fact, a recent study (Grissom et al., 2021) indicates a positive correlation between leaders of color and moderate increases in retention among teachers of color. However, this study did not indicate any conclusive findings regarding participants’ experiences with their leaders of color. Although more than half of the participants experienced a leader of color at one point in their career, very seldom did they express ethno-racial or gender match with their leader contributed to their professional experiences or decision-making in a positive manner. It is possible to conceive that the lack of conclusive findings on this topic merit additional investigation.

Prior studies have also examined the extent to which interactions and relationships among colleagues are linked to the professional experiences of teachers of color, decision-making, and turnover. Namely, multiple studies suggest that teachers of color may experience racial micro-aggressive from colleagues who do not share their ethno-racial backgrounds (Duncan, 2019; Frank et al. 2021; Kohli, 2018). The present findings of this study are consistent with this body of literature. Additionally, micro-aggressive treatment and hostility from their colleagues appeared to factor into their professional experiences and decision-making than racialized and gendered interactions with school leaders. A possible explanation for this might be that participants in this study interacted more with their colleagues than their school leaders considering that school faculty often outnumber school leaders. Another possible explanation is that power dynamics are different between teachers and leaders and perhaps influence the frequency and nature of teacher-leader interactions, therefore reducing the number of times in which micro-aggressions may occur. Altogether, the findings of this present
study add to the research base about the prominence of interracial relationships and their influence on how teachers of color navigate the social context of work. These findings also bear in mind the importance of including diversity, equity, and inclusion related to positionalities when hiring and evaluating staff as these factor into school racial climate.

Prior research also links ethno-racial matches with colleagues with teacher turnover and retention decisions (Bristol, 2018). This present study conveys the significance of supportive intra-racial relationships to buffer against gendered and racial stigma as well as navigate workplace dynamics. These findings are consistent with this body of literature regarding school workplace relationships among Black women (Dunmeyer, 2020; Johnson, 2015). In contrast to earlier findings, however, some participants explained experiencing intra-racial micro-aggressions. Many of these were at the hands of Black men. These differences can be explained by individual factors, such as personality, or have broader implications regarding gender in the workplace. It is important to bear in mind the possible bias in responses since participants are self-selecting which stories to share. However, this combination of findings provides some support for the conceptual premise that communities of color are not a monolith.

Additionally, it is critical to consider the implications of cross-gender dynamics and how these may cause variation in how teachers of color relate to other members of their ethno-racial group. Also, it is possible that the convergence of cross-gender dynamics compounds issues of power and privilege, thus explaining the manifestation of cross-gender intra-racial tensions that Camile and Mo experienced with their Black male school leaders.
Another aspect of organizational conditions that are underexplored in the literature but present in the findings are contrasting perspectives regarding professionalism and how it is actualized in the workplace. Participants revealed that written and unwritten expectations for professional conduct attempt to govern their aesthetic choices. Their rejection of such organizational norms such as dress and hair codes reflect a larger resistance to conceptualizations of their identities as inferior or inadequate for the workplace. This finding has important implications for developing a more robust understanding of cultural inclusivity in the workplace by illustrating the mechanisms that can be changed to foster working conditions that affirm diverse identities and backgrounds. Work by Mason et al. (2021) and Khalifah et al. (2016) have demonstrated the potency of culturally responsive and sustaining school environments on teachers of color but stop short of talking about how aspects of organizational conditions such as professional expectations undermine these efforts. This finding, while preliminary, advances prior conclusions regarding how schools can foster affirming and inclusive workplaces.

Sociocultural Aspect of School Working Conditions

Regarding the sociocultural aspect of school working conditions, prior studies in teacher diversity literature draw numerous conclusions about the impact of teachers of color on student behavioral and disciplinary outcomes. As mentioned in the literature review, students of color often experience lower rates of disciplinary action and less time out of school when taught by teachers of color than when taught by white teachers (Togut, 2011). As such, arguments to diversify the teacher workforce often draw
attention to how teachers of color utilize a variety of strategies to address student behavior. Works by Brockenbrough (2015) and Blake et al. (2016) problematize depictions of teachers of color as being exemplar classroom managers by examining the ways in which such assumptions influence how these teachers are positioned by school leaders and colleagues as disciplinarians first and teachers second. Although findings of this present study are unable to conclusively support these themes in the literature, participants indicated numerous micro-aggressive encounters with colleagues and school leadership in which inaccurate claims and assumptions were made about their ability to manage students. Participants also expressed racial micro-aggressions conveyed implicit beliefs about the nature of their qualifications and competency as classroom teachers. Comparison of these findings with those of other studies draw attention to how association of Black teachers as classroom managers (and even teachers of color more broadly) undercuts the ways in which these skills may be linked to their instructional preparation, engaging pedagogy, ability to build relationships, beliefs about students of color, or other aspects of their technical expertise and mindsets about historically marginalized people groups. These findings may be somewhat limited; although most participants experienced racial micro-aggressions from non-Black staff, not all of these incidents were linked to assumptions about participants’ ability to teach and manage student behavior. However, these present findings provide further support for the hypothesis that perceived benefits of teacher diversity may in fact contribute to the ways in which teachers of color are micro-aggressed, stereotyped, or tokenized particularly in hard-to-staff school contexts that serve predominantly children of color.
Expectations for teaching and learning are also embedded in the sociocultural aspect of school working conditions. Prior studies in teacher diversity literature—especially those guided by critical theory and focus on Black women—focus on elements of teacher pedagogy (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1997; Clark, 2019; Dixson, 2003). Of central importance to this topic are the ways in which depictions of Black women’s pedagogy may be consistent with elements of social justice teaching (Boone, 2020; Johnson, 2015), culturally informed teaching methods (Gardener et al., 2020; James-Hallaway & Harris, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2009), emancipatory pedagogies (McKinney de Royston, 2020), other techniques focus on raising student critical consciousness (Kohli et al., 2019). Findings in this present research are consistent with these depictions. Although prior studies focus on resistance that teachers of color (including Black women) may face in adopting such pedagogies, the women in this present study did not discuss opposition. In fact, women described how they supplemented the curriculum, engaged students in race-related current events, taught the truth about American history, and facilitated conversations with students about navigating a racialized society apart from whether these were condoned by their school leaders or not. Of the eight participants, only one did not apply these techniques in her classroom. This may be the case because she was assigned to teach ELA (although certified as a social studies teacher) and self-reported that she was struggling in the classroom. It may have been the case that she was unaware of how to incorporate these techniques into the ELA classroom or was focused on other priorities particularly because she was at risk for non-renewal of her teaching contract. Altogether, additional information is needed to explain this discrepancy. However, data from the other participants suggest that agency and resistance undergirded their
pedagogical decision-making to develop lessons that were relevant and responsive to their students’ daily realities.

Theoretical Implications

This study seeks to extend teacher diversity scholarship by exploring intersectionality and identity negotiation as factors shaping the professional experiences and decision-making of teachers of color. Guided by recommendations from Dickens and Chavez (2018), Woodson and Bristol (2020), and other scholars who argue issues of intersectionality and identity negotiation are underexplored in teacher diversity literature, this present study accomplishes a contextual analysis of intersectionality and identity negotiation among Black women. In this next section, I will discuss the implications of this study for scholarship and how findings are situated within the larger body of literature about teacher diversity.

Black Feminist Thought is one of two theoretical frameworks guiding this study. It provides a lens by which overlapping identities and corresponding systems of marginalization may influence the ways in which individuals experience and respond to interpersonal and environmental cues. This study endeavored to explore the intersections of ethnicity, race, and gender to expand our understanding regarding heterogeneity of the African diaspora and name ethnic background as an important dimension of identity in addition to race for some individuals. 50% (n = 4) of the women selected to participate in this study named their ethnic roots as an important aspect of their identities. Despite the heterogeneity of the participant sample, the participants revealed a “distinctive Black feminist consciousness” regarding their positioning in relation to power and resistance to
domination (Collins, 1989, p. 748). Thus, Black Feminism lent itself to exploring how participants shared related experiences in terms of how they were racialized and gendered by school leaders and colleagues in the workplace.

Black Feminist Thought also provided a lens to interpret participants’ decision-making to exert their own agency. It also provided a lens to interpret decision-making as a reflection of self-definition, self-valuation, and efforts to enact social change inside and outside the classroom. Use of Black Feminist Thought is helpful to re-frame the narratives present in teacher diversity literature regarding teachers of color, challenging working conditions, and turnover. Instead, Black Feminist Thought draws from Black women’s epistemological standpoint and embodied wisdom to consider forms of resistance, self-reliance, and empowerment as a characteristic framing the work of Black women teachers who both acknowledge the challenges of school working conditions yet choose to persist for the betterment of their students. As such, the theoretical framing of Black Feminist Thought is helpful to explain the ways in which minoritized communities of color can be autonomous agents of change who pursue their own liberation as the liberation of others.

At times, Black Feminist Thought fell short in describing the interaction between race, gender, and other aspects of their social location (e.g., ethnic backgrounds, linguistic diversity, immigration, social class, etc.) and how these factors together influenced professional experiences and decision-making. For example, both Camile and Jannell came from predominantly white suburban backgrounds. Both expressed perceiving cultural gaps between their own upbringing and the students in low-income communities that they served. Additionally, Camile expressed a tension in not feeling
‘Black enough nor African enough’. Despite these cultural gaps, Camile described that she was able to adapt her practice to acclimate to her students and become a successful teacher over the course of her ten-year career. Conversely, Jannell expressed difficulty in developing relationships with students as well as other aspects of her craft. The present data and theoretical framework are insufficient to explain the decisions that each teacher made that allowed them to overcome perceived gaps particularly when these teachers perceived their lived experiences to be very different from their students. In addition, Beyoncé felt strongly about her Nigerian identity and the ways in which the African diaspora needed to be united for the purpose of collective liberation. However, Black Feminist Thought failed to illuminate the transnational perspective held by Beyoncé. One possibility might be to draw on endarkened feminist theory and Africana womanism to (re)member and situate Black women’s pedagogy within the larger context of the transnational African diaspora. In fact, Dillard and Neal (2020) found these frameworks lend themselves to explore how “Black women teachers in the US have often sustained their teaching based in spiritual and cultural understandings drawn from Africa, whether conscious of these carryovers or not” (p. 371). Lastly, there was an opportunity to further explain intra-racial gender dynamics between Black women and Black men. To do so, perhaps Black Feminist Thought should be supplemented with another theoretical frame that explores intra-racial gender dynamics.

Data analysis also suggests the utility of Cultural Contract Theory as a tool to explore the subliminal contracts that are offered in schools, particularly in settings where Black teachers and teachers of color are the numerical minority. Although this framework provides a useful way to conceptualize the agreements that teachers of color make and
how this influences how they negotiate their identities, it would be better to utilize a theoretical lens that explores negotiation of multiple aspects of identity and not those merely limited to ethno-racial group membership. For example, Dickens (2014) proposes extending Cultural Contract Theory by observing how identity may be negotiated in both inter-racial and intra-racial contexts. Similarly, I would argue that extending Cultural Contract Theory to explore how gender, sexuality, or other socially constructed categories may be negotiated in tandem with other intersection of identities. Additionally, Jackson’s interpretation of motivations of assimilationism can also be complicated as suggested by previous works (see Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Dickens et al., 2019).

Recommendations for Future Research

In this section, recommendations for future teacher diversity research are given to deepen understanding of intersectionality, identity negotiation, and social context of schools.

*Exploring Additional Dimensions of Identity*

This present study examined intersection of ethno-racial and gender identities as factors shaping teachers of color. However, additional investigation may explore other dimensions of identity. In addition to looking at variations of ethno-racial and gender identities, other aspects of social location should be explored. For example, additional exploration into the experiences of teachers of color who identify as biracial or multiracial would certainly add to the literature on teachers of color. As mentioned in participant profiles, the women in this study represented a wide range of backgrounds,
including social class, educational attainment, sexuality, language and immigration, and other aspects of identity. Participants also expressed aspects of their lives such as faith traditions and marital status also influenced how they thought about teaching and made decisions. As such, an intersectional lens provides unfettered opportunities to explore how different minoritized groups engage overlapping aspects of their identity in the workplace.

*Exploring Intra-Racial and Cross-Gender Staff Dynamics*

Related to intersectionality, future research might build on emerging concepts in the data around interracial and intra-racial workplace interactions and relationships and how these influence the professional experiences and decision-making of teachers of color. Ana and Jay had significant intra-racial micro-aggressive encounters. As such, future research might also address topics such as colorism and intra-racial tension and how these may be experienced by teachers of color in the workplace. For instance, a research study might explore gendered racialization and how this is experienced by Afro-Latinx teachers in predominantly white or white-passing organizational contexts. Another study might investigate how biracial and multiracial teachers negotiate their identities amidst school organizational conditions and the extent to which they participate in identity-shifting behaviors in interpersonal relationships and encounters with others who share aspects of their ethno-racial identities for the purpose of social belonging. Another contradiction surfaced in the data related to gender and how self-identified Black women held mixed opinions regarding workplace relationships with Black male colleagues and leaders. Namely, Mo’s and Camile’s opinions regarding their Black male
leaders raise intriguing questions regarding the nature and influence of racial match within the context of teacher-school leader relationships. Although Mo and Camile both had Black male school leaders, there is abundant room to explore the nature of these relationships within and across gender identities. As such, future studies might compare perceptions of school leadership practice among Black women with both Black male and female administrators.

Likewise, Camile and Ana’s experiences with their Black male colleagues add complexity to how intra-racial cross-gender dynamics with and among colleagues are conceptualized in teacher diversity literature. Subsequently, future quantitative and qualitative studies on these topics should be undertaken to explore how teachers of color experience cross-gender and intra-racial relationships with colleagues and school leaders and the extent to which these relationships influence social belonging, workplace satisfaction, and intentions to stay in teaching or leave.

Exploring Inter-Racial Dynamics between Teachers of Color and Their Students

A considerable amount of research has investigated the influence of teachers of color on the educational experiences and academic outcomes of students of color (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). While the term "students of color" is often used to broadly describe non-white students, a great deal of studies have focused on the effects of ethno-racial matching on Black and Latino students. To a lesser degree is the influence of teachers of color on white students.

On this subject, works by Anderson (2015) and Ferlazzo (2018) suggest that teachers of color can counter implicit associations and preconceived notions about
communities of color held by white students and reinforced through their social networks. Additionally, meaningful relationships with teachers of color can promote reflection about white students' critical consciousness and their own racial privilege (Michael & Bartoli, 2014). Participant narratives in this present study are significant in the ways in which teachers explained aspects of their pedagogy and practice towards non-Black students. In one such example, Jay perceived that her biracial identity provided a cultural bridge to build relationships with both her white and Black students as well as foster inter-racial empathy in her classroom. Future studies on the current topic are therefore recommended. Further studies might explore questions such as "to what extent are white students' assignment to Black teachers associated with positive academic and social outcomes?" It may be the case that the findings of such studies substantiate Ladson-Billing's remarks to EdWeek author, Larry Ferlazzo (2018):

I want to suggest that there is something that may be even more important than Black students having Black teachers and that is White students having Black teachers! It is important for White students to encounter Black people who are knowledgeable and hold some level of authority over them. Black students ALREADY know that Black people have a wide range of capabilities. They see them in their homes, their neighborhoods, and their churches. They are the Sunday School teachers, their Scout Leaders, their coaches, and family members. But what opportunities do White students have to see and experience Black competence?

Studies regarding culturally informed teaching methods often exclusively focus on implementation in school and classroom contexts that predominantly serve minoritized students. Since these pedagogies are often associated with teachers of color, future studies might focus on attributes of culturally informed methods of teaching in classrooms where teachers of color and students differ in terms of ethno-racial background. Mo, although not a heritage speaker nor a self-identified Latina, learned
Spanish to develop relationships with Latino students, foster cultural awareness and empathy among her non-Spanish-speaking students, and fill gaps between the school and students' families. She also described adapting her curriculum to include books with Spanish phrases and cultural references that reflected her Latino students' ethno-racial backgrounds. Further studies, which consider ethno-racial mismatch between teachers of color and their students and the effects of culturally informed teaching, will need to be undertaken.

*Deepening Understanding of Identity Negotiation*

Additionally, future research might explore issues of identity negotiation as factors shaping educators of color at different points in their professional pathway. Regarding Black women for example, research might address questions such as "*how do ethno-racial and gender identities influence how Black women pre-service teachers negotiate their identities to adapt to university pre-service teacher education programs?*" A related question might be to explore identity negotiation within the context of student teaching, applying for jobs, and as an early career teacher. Additional investigations might also explore how principals of color negotiate their identities in the workplace and the ways in which identity shifting is similar to (or different from) how they negotiated their identities as classroom teachers. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Dickens’s (2018) Matrix of Identity Negotiation, studies on this topic might also address how teachers of color negotiate their identities in different spaces within schools (e.g., professional development, teaching in the classroom, one-on-one meetings with school leadership, common spaces with colleagues).
Exploring Interplay of Social Context, Professional Experiences, and Decision-Making

As discussed in the literature review, the interplay of working conditions and the professional experiences of teachers of color is an emerging issue in teacher diversity. However, few studies have focused on how the social context of schools influences in-school dynamics and the ways in which teachers of color think about and respond to these social issues. In this study, participants expressed social issues such as police brutality, gun violence, and even the deaths of their own students shaped their experiences and decision-making. Future studies might build on this topic by exploring how issues related to civil unrest and community violence influence how teachers of color do their work. In addition, exploring the relationship between these social issues and teacher turnover may also yield important findings.

Exploring the Interplay of (Re)membering and Other-Mothering

Future research might also draw on Black feminist Thought to facilitate (re)membering among Black women teachers. (Re)membering, as Dillard and Neal (2020) write, is a powerful strategy "to envision and gather perspectives of the means by which Black women teachers intentionally reconnect, restore, and recapture [their] indigenous ways of being and knowing in the classroom. As such, Black Feminist Thought provides lens by which to encourage (re)membering among Black women teachers to situate aspects of their professional experiences and decision-making within a broader sociohistorical and theoretical frame of other-mothering. Additionally, other-mothering is extensively explored in higher education literature yet remains under-explored within the context of K-12 schools. That being the case, additional studies
should be undertaken to investigate other-mothering and the work of Black women teachers.

Collins (2000) outlines 3 characteristics of other-mothering:

1. Other-mothers often exude a personal responsibility for the self-reliance and self-determination of their community. Subsequently, other-mothers draw on their agency to advance social change.

2. Other-mothers see themselves as partners to support- not replace- families' efforts to care for and raise their children. This may be apparent in how other-mothers utilize family language to describe their students and assist blood relatives with mothering responsibilities.

3. Other-mothers employ a critical conscious and politically oriented ethics of care for their students' physical wellbeing and survival in a racialized society.

Works by Case (1997), Beauboef-Lafontant (1997, 2002), and Dixson & Dingus (2008) extrapolate elements of other-mothering in their investigations of Black women's intentions to teach as well as interactions with students and their families. Narratives in this present study are also consistent with these depictions. However, additional studies on this topic may encourage (re)membering by addressing questions such as "How do ethno-racial and gender identities influence how Black women teachers interact with their students and their families?" and "To what extent does motherhood influence how Black women teachers describe their work as a classroom teachers?" Related studies may also stimulate (re)membering by exploring influential figures or teacher characteristics that shape elements of their pedagogy and practice. Hence, exploration of
these questions may facilitate (re)membering by connecting aspects of their identity as Black women to their profession. As a multi-racial woman of the African diaspora, these questions are powerful and facilitate my own (re)membering; in particular, having benefited from other-mothering and served in this capacity certainly underscore how I think about teaching and approach my students.

It may also be the case that further study on other-mothering may deepen reverence and respect for "Black women’s status… [due to] their activist mothering as community other-mothers" among Black women as well as those who do not identify as Black women (Collins, 2000, p. 192). Exploring elements of other-mothering may also mitigate controlling images of Black women teachers (e.g., "Superstrong Black mother", "the mammy") in educational research that contribute to the marginalization of Black women. As such, employing qualitative methods with Black Feminist Thought allows for Black women to provide asset-based, self-defined characterizations regarding their work as classroom teachers.

Recommendations for Implementation

In this section, recommendations for practice and policy are given as it relates to applying the lessons learned from this study.

School Leadership Preparation and Training

The findings of this present study are useful to inform the pre-service school leadership preparation and job-embedded training.
Pre-Service Preparation

Effective instructional leadership and resource management of schools requires a sensitivity to issues of diversity and inclusion. Regarding school leadership preparation, critical awareness of one's positionality, hidden curriculum moderated through school working conditions, and overlapping systems of marginalization are prerequisite to recruiting and retaining a highly qualified and ethno-racially diverse staff (Mason et al., 2021). To do this, pre-service programs for aspiring school leaders must engage their students in ongoing reflection about aspects of their own identities and social location. In addition, pre-service programs must include opportunities to learn from ethno-racially and gender-diverse faculty who can share from their own lived experiences, standpoints, and expertise regarding engaging issues of workplace marginalization and inclusion. Finally, aspiring school leaders should have opportunities to apply learning regarding issues of equity and inclusion and be given feedback on their performance. This can occur within the context of field practicum or even case studies (albeit real life context is preferred).

Job-Embedded Training

This present study confirms findings from prior studies that argue school leadership necessitates ongoing training and support to apply culturally responsive and sustaining practices (Khalifah et al., 2016; Mason, et al., 2021). However, this present study would situate these training within the context of intersectionality and how overlapping mechanisms of marginalization are moderated through school working
conditions and interpersonal interactions. As such, this research proposes job-embedded training for school leaders to address the gaps experienced by participants in this study. First, training must involve school leaders to reflect on their intersections of identity and social location. Then, training should require principals to consider how aspects of their own positionality and biases are conveyed in their instructional leadership and management. Then, school leaders are to be equipped to collect feedback from invested partners of diverse backgrounds in the school to facilitate their own reflection about aspects of school structural, organizational, and sociocultural conditions that may be oppressive to minoritized groups. Finally, school leaders should have access to training and ongoing support with leading diversity initiatives to ensure they are goal-oriented, embedded within the school priorities, and a meaningful component of teachers’ work both inside and outside of their classroom. Since coaching and mentorship are leading mechanisms to drive change, I suggest leaders both engage in this process to improve in their managerial oversight over anti-racist initiatives as well as be trained to provide feedback to school staff regarding issues of diversity and inclusion.

Local Educational Agency (LEA) Leadership

Findings of this study also undergird recommendations for local education agencies (LEAs) and the leadership of such entities. Working conditions of individual schools are not manufactured in a vacuum. As a matter of fact, LEAs provide directives, policy initiatives, and assistive support that shape the structural, organizational, and sociocultural conditions in schools. Additionally, LEAs play a pivotal role in teacher recruitment and retention initiatives. With this in mind, the findings of this present
research lead to three recommendations for LEAs. The first recommendation is examination of curriculum and instructional materials. The second recommendation is for human resource leadership to provide consultative and assistive support to school leadership to evaluate readiness of school working conditions for diverse candidates. The third recommendation is prioritizing culturally responsive and sustaining practices when hiring and evaluating school staff.

*Examining Curriculum and Instruction*

In this study, all participants described a gap that school-provided curriculum and instructional materials often were not culturally responsive or reflective of their students. Even in the African-centered schools, participants described supplementing or modifying curriculum and instructional materials with counter-narratives and role models to classroom lessons to challenge deficit assumptions about communities of color, portray the achievements of exceptional figures, and positively foster students’ racial identity. Participants explained that they were unsupported in this work. Taken together with increasing centralization of instructional programs (Sharma, 2018), the recommendation is that LEAs partner with schools to select culturally responsive and sustaining curricula and instructional materials to provide windows and mirrors to students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

The second part of this would be to accomplish an equity audit of current curricula and instructional materials to determine bright spots, areas of improvement, and where needed, overhaul the curriculum altogether. Additionally, LEAs can partner with
school leaders to train and support teachers in incorporating culturally responsive and sustaining practices into their pedagogies.

*Evaluating Working Conditions for Diversity*

The stories of the self-identified Black women in this study point to the significance of school working conditions and how these influence teacher professional experiences and decision-making. Furthermore, this dissertation study is situated within a larger social problem of under-representation of teachers of color and disproportional turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2021). To enhance the efficacy of recruitment of diverse candidates, LEA human resource leaders need to consider the types of conditions in which teachers are invited and proactively work with school leadership to uproot elements of school working conditions that may be experienced as oppressive to members of minoritized communities. These initiatives cannot be divorced from addressing intersections of sexism, classism, and other systems of marginalization in school.

*Prioritizing Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Staff*

Finally, LEA human resource personnel should prioritize recruiting, hiring, and retaining culturally responsive and sustaining staff members for the purpose of fostering workplace ecologies that are affirming and inclusive to different dimensions of diversity. This recommendation is in line to address some of the micro-aggressive and discriminatory encounters that participants conveyed in written narrative and verbal interviews. In recruitment and during the hiring process, human resources should
implement targeted processes such as case studies and interview questions to evaluate the mindset, beliefs, and attitudes of prospective leaders, faculty, and other school regarding equity and workplace inclusion. In line with this recommendation, the Northern Illinois University Office of Affirmative Action and Equity offers a recruitment toolkit with questions to facilitate this process.

Policy Constituents

The findings of this study also have implications for invested partners in the political ecosystem. In this section, recommendations are given for policymakers and advocates.

Policymakers

Ingersoll and his co-researchers (2011; 2017) among others have observed numerous policy initiatives to diversify the teacher workforce since the 1980's (see also Smith et al., 2022). While these initiatives have added to the numbers of teachers of color in the educator workforce, the efficacy of these plans are undermined by disproportional turnover. To this end, I propose two suggestions guided by this study. This first is for policymakers to exert influence on local educational agencies (LEAs), holding them accountable to report numbers of teachers of color that are recruited into their districts. Additionally, data should be collected and made publicly available as it relates to ethno-racial and gender diversity, teacher retention, and teacher turnover. Several entities have reported that such transparency will provide guidance as to LEA performance in retaining highly qualified teachers of color.
The second implication is that policymakers draw attention to intersectionality as a critical layer of developing a diverse teacher workforce. This can be accomplished by illuminating how racial justice cannot be achieved apart from addressing issues of sexism, classism, able-ism, hetero-sexism, linguistic imperialism among other marginalizing practices.

Policy Advocates

This present study holds implications for policy advocates such as grassroots organizers, non-profit entities, and K-20 professionals. Undergirded by the findings of this study, it is critical to hold an intersectional lens to our collective efforts in diversify the teacher workforce and resist essentialism of people of color. To do this, two aims must be accomplished.

First, this study is predicated upon exploring the disaggregated experiences of Black women as a distinct group while also exploring aspects of social location that generate heterogeneity. As such, policy advocates must balance drawing attention to large issues of teacher diversity while also exploring the experiences and stories of various groups and how these are uniquely shaped by overlapping sociocultural and historical factors in addition to intersections of identity. This requires time, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of findings. However, a more complex understanding of factors undermining the diversification of the teacher workforce is needed to enhance our efforts.

The second recommendation is to advocate and disrupt as needed for the sake of developing culturally affirming and inclusive working conditions. These efforts should be
paired with messaging to increase numbers of teachers of color. Taken together with even higher numbers of teachers of color expected to leave education post-Covid (Rosenberg & Anderson, 2021), failure to address working conditions will render useless our best laid plans to diversify the teacher workforce.

The aim of these recommendations is to address the negative elements of participants’ workplace experiences since these are consistent with prior studies linking turnover of teachers of color with poor leadership and school working conditions (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018). Furthermore, leadership quality and school working conditions are closely linked to the policy and advocacy initiatives to diversify the teacher workforce. Implementation of these recommendations is to mitigate disproportionate turnover among teachers of color and foster inclusive and affirming work environments.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the professional experiences and decision-making of self-identified Black women teachers in urban schools. Employing qualitative methods and narrative design, this research sought to address three questions:

1. How do self-identified Black women teachers explain ethno-racial and gender identities as factors influencing their pedagogical decisions?

2. How do the ethno-racial and gender identities of self-identified Black women influence workplace interactions and relationships with colleagues and school leaders?
3. *How do ethno-racial and gender identities influence how Black women teachers negotiate their identities to adapt to working conditions in urban schools?*

Guided by Black Feminist Though and Cultural Contract Theory, analysis of demographic surveys and multiple semi-structured interviews yielded ten themes in response to these research questions. These themes are:

1. Supplementing curriculum with counter-narratives and role models
2. Facilitating conversations about race-related current events
3. Teaching the truth about American history
4. Guiding students to navigate a racialized society
5. Experiencing micro-aggressions within the context of interracial interactions
6. Disengaging from diversity initiatives
7. Participating in supportive intra-racial relationships
8. Buffering against cultural stereotypes
9. Pursuing desired ends
10. Redefining professionalism

Altogether, these themes reveal insight about how intersectionality and identity negotiation factored into self-identified Black women teachers understood and navigated their workplace. Although a contextual analysis on Black women teachers, the findings of this present research convey new insights into the experiences of teachers of color more broadly. Furthermore, the results of this study may be used to guide further research, practice, and policy.
Final Thoughts

Learning some of the histories of trailblazing women teachers of color shaped my decision-making in part to focus on Black women in this present study. In my undergraduate education studies, figures such as John Dewey and Horace Mann were present in the class syllabi and in discussion. Their philosophies and accomplishments never felt important although I was socialized to consider them the forefathers of the American educational system. However, their stories held no personal meaning for me. It was not until I was introduced to texts such as *Dreamkeepers* (Ladson-Billings, 1994), *The Education of Blacks in the South* (Anderson, 1988) and *In the Crossfire* (Spencer, 2012) among other sociology and history books that I began to appreciate the subversive resistance, resilience, and unflinching heroism displayed by teachers of color throughout American history. I was particularly impacted by the significant roles held by many women teachers of color and the ways in which their stories were glossed over. In fact, I found these stories mirrored the impact and legacies of inspirational women teachers of color that I encountered in my own educational experiences and teaching career. Among these include Black and Latina teacher educators, mentors, professors, and even an old boss or two.

As I conversed for hours with each participant via Zoom, I could not help but think about their stories within this historical frame and liberatory tradition of women teachers of color. Words cannot express the depth of gratitude I have for these women who sacrificed their time, energy, and efforts to talk with me. Old and young alike, they became my teachers as they generously shared their embodied wisdom and their passion for the communities they served. As an educator and former leader, it pained me to see...
the ways in which many of these women were not set up for success in their schools; I perceived that many macro- and micro-level factors were not setting up these women to thrive. Or so I thought. Many of the prolific women educators that I learned about—Septima Clark, Ruth Hayre, Deirdre A. Almeida, and Elsa Salazar Cade to name a few—also withstood monumental opposition to their work. However, the beauty of their stories is they persevered. These women persevered and impacted many lives in the process. Although the historical narratives of prolific women teachers are inspiring, it is critical to acknowledge that history also occurs in the present. My point is this: I solemnly believe that the women I worked with throughout data collection are an extension of this historical community of women teachers of color who are advocates for social change and community uplift. They are unapologetic inside and outside the classroom. In acknowledgment of the historical and contemporary contributions of women teachers of color taken together with the ‘democracy imperative’ mentioned in chapter two to have an educator workforce that reflects the ethno-racial diversity of this country, it is critical to improve the conditions for teaching and learning in which teachers of color find themselves.
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*Center for American Progress.*


https://doi.org/10.1177/00131245221076086


APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT FLYER

Black Women Teachers: A Research Study

You are invited to participate in a study examining identity, professional experiences, and decision-making in urban schools.

Participation in the study will involve:
• A demographic survey (10–15 minutes)
• Three interviews via Zoom (90–120 minutes each)

Eligibility requirements:
• Identify as female
• Identify as a member of the African diaspora
• Teacher in an urban charter or public school

For more info, scan the QR code or go to tinyurl.com/UrbanSchoolStudy.

This study has been approved by Temple University IRB #210193.
For more information, contact doctoral researcher, Andrea TerreroGabshaden at ATG@temple.edu
APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Part 1 of 4: Demographic Information

- **What is your gender?**
  - Male / Female / Other

- **How old are you?**
  - Under 25; 25-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50-59; 60+

- **How do you self-identify (race and ethnicity)? Check as many as apply.**
  - White
  - African American or Black
  - Hispanic or *Latino/a/x*
  - Asian
  - Other:

- **Language(s) spoken**
  - English
  - Spanish
  - Other:

Part 2 of 4: Current Employment Status

- **Employment status as a teacher:**
  - Full-time; Part-time (50-90% of full-time hours); Part-time (less than 50 of full-time hours)

- **Employment status and contract as a teacher:**
  - Permanent employment (an on-going contract with no fixed end-point before the age of retirement)
  - Fixed term contract for a period of more than 1 school-year
  - Fixed term contract for a period of 1 school-year or less.

- **Employment status and position as a teacher:**
  - Teacher of record; Classroom assistant; Para-professional; Other (please explain: __________)

- **Where do you currently work?**
  - Public school (District: __________)
  - Charter (Charter name: __________)
  - Other:
● What do you teach currently? Please provide subject(s) currently teaching and grade(s).
  ○ Grades: Elementary; Secondary; Across Grade Bands; Ungraded
  ○ Subject Area: English; Math; Social Studies/History; Science; Foreign Language; Electives; Other (Please describe: ___________)

● What do you teach currently? Please provide subject(s) formerly taught and grade(s).

● What is the highest level of formal education that you have completed?
  ○ Associate's degree; Bachelor's degree; Master's degree; Master's degree + 30 credits; Doctoral or professional degree

Part 3 of 4: Employment History

● How long have you been working as a teacher?
  ○ This is my first year; 1-2 years; 3-5 years; 6-10 years; 11-15 years; 16-20 years;

● Are you certified?
  ○ Yes; No; Other (please explain: ___________)
  ○ If yes, please elaborate below-
    ■ grade level:
    ■ subject area:

● Where did you attain your teaching credentials?
  ○ Undergraduate certification program; Graduate certification program; Other: _____.

● Is this your first career?
  ○ Yes
  ○ No

Part 4 of 4: Short Answer Questions

4. What does it mean for you- personally and professionally- to be a teacher?

5. What expectations do you have of yourself as a classroom teacher? How does that influence how you interact with students and staff?

6. Tell a story about a time, event, or interaction that characterizes your experience as a woman of color at your job. For you, why was this event significant?
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 1

Interview Focus: Teaching, School Structural, and Organizational Conditions

Personal/Professional History
1. Let's start with your background. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
   a. Follow up: How do you identify in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, etc.?
2. Can you please describe the kind of schools you attended from Pre-K to 12th grade?
3. What is a strong memory you have of your PK-12 experience?

Entry to Teaching
1. Tell me the story about how you decided to become a teacher?
   a. Follow up: How did you come to teach in [urban area]?
2. What parts of teaching do you like?
3. What aspects of teaching do you think need improvement?

Perception of Teaching
1. What does it mean to be a successful teacher?

School Structural Conditions
1. What brought you to teaching at [insert school name]?
2. What are your main duties in your current position at this school?
   a. Follow up: How have your main duties shifted as a result of Covid?
3. What attracted you to this position at this school?
4. What does it mean to be successful in your current position at this school?
   Follow up: does it mean to be successful in your current position at this school during the era of Covid?

School Organization Conditions
1. Tell me about the leadership and management structure at [insert school name]?
2. To what extent do teachers at [insert school name] have influence on influencing school-wide policies and decisions?
   a. Follow up: Tell me a story about a time where teachers influenced school-wide policies and decisions.
3. How do you describe culture and relationships between staff members at [insert school name]?
   a. Follow up: Do you have any examples that you believe best characterize collegiality and collaboration among the staff?
4. How do you describe staff relationships with students and families?
5. How do you describe the level of autonomy you have over classroom and curriculum decisions?
   a. [Late career teachers- 10 years or more]: How do you compare the level of autonomy you experience now versus earlier in your career?

6. Tell me about the types of professional development and support you receive at [insert school name]?
   a. Follow up: From your vantage, what types of professional development and support you receive has had the most impact on your practice?
   b. Follow up: Take me through the last professional development session you attended that you thought effective. Describe it from beginning to end.
   c. Follow up: Take me through the last professional development session you attended that you thought was ineffective. Describe it from beginning to end.

Closing
1. Is there anything else that you’d like to add that is relevant to this conversation?
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 2

Interview Focus: Ethnic-Racial and Gender Identities

Introduction
1. In our last conversation, we talked about entry to teaching, your perception of teaching as a career, and working conditions. Is there anything that you would like to add or re-visit as it relates to these topics from our last conversation?

Ethnic-Racial and Gender Identity
2. You indicated [in our last conversation/on the demographic survey] that you identify as [insert participant self-assigned terms]. What does it mean to you to be [insert participant self-assigned terms]? 
   1. Tentative: Have you ever been mistaken for another racial or ethnic background other than [insert participant self-assigned terms]?

3. What messages, if any, did you receive as a child from your family about what it means to be [insert participant self-assigned terms]? 
   1. Follow up: How has your understanding of being [insert participant self-assigned terms] changed over time?

4. In terms of importance, do some aspects of your identities hold more weight to you than others? 
   1. Follow up: Can you tell me about the last time you found that one of your identities held more weight to you than others?

5. Tell me about a time when you felt proud or empowered as a [insert participant self-assigned terms].

6. Tell me about the last time you experienced a challenge due to [insert participant self-assigned terms]. Can you describe what happened?

Ethnic-Racial and Gender Identity in the Current Sociopolitical Context
7. In our last conversation, I asked how the pandemic shaped your working conditions as an educator. Today, I would like to build on this by think more broadly about how you have experienced the pandemic as well as other prominent events. Can you tell me the story of how you experienced the pandemic? 
   1. To what extent does being an educator impact how you experienced the pandemic?

8. Last Summer, the United States experienced what some call a “racial reckoning” due to the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others. We also saw a rise in activism, including many school districts and charters releasing public statements about antiracism efforts. How did these events influence how you saw your work as a [insert participant self-assigned terms] educator?
9. More recently, we see a spotlight and strong opposition against critical race theory. How do these events influence how you saw your work as a [insert participant self-assigned terms] educator?

Social Location & Educational Attainment
On the demographic survey and in our last conversation, you mentioned that you’ve earned [X degree(s)]. However, with these next two questions, I’m interested to learn about the educational attainment of the adults who raised you. By the time you were 16….
10. What was the highest degree that parent/guardian 1 completed?
11. What was the highest degree that parent/guardian 2 completed?
12. What messages, if any, were conveyed in your home as a child from your family about advancing your education after high school?
13. How have these messages influenced how you see your work as a [insert participant self-assigned terms] educator?

Closing
14. Is there anything else that you’d like to add that is relevant to this conversation?
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 3

Interview Focus: Identity Negotiation; Mobility Decisions

Introduction
1. In our last conversation, we talked about what your ethnic-racial identity means to you as well as during the sociopolitical moment (or “racial reckoning” as many call it) that was sparked by the murder of George Floyd.

Is there anything that you would like to add or re-visit as it relates to these topics from our last conversation?

School Structural and Organizational Conditions Post-Covid [Virtual Instruction]
1. I’d like to start off by confirming two things:
   a. Current school
   b. Current title/position
2. What factors influenced you to [move to a new school / stay at your current school]?
3. Have you returned to teaching in-person? Can you describe for me what the return to teaching in-person has been like for you?
   a. In what ways, if at all, have your duties shifted since Covid or because of Covid?
   b. In what ways, if at all, have the nature of the pandemic and racial reckoning influenced how you interact with and teach your students?
4. Has your school experienced any significant leadership, management, or staff changes? To what extent do you think these changes are impacted by the pandemic and how do they impact you?
5. How does your school define success now upon returning to in-person learning after over a year of virtual [or hybrid] instruction? How does this impact your work on a daily basis?
6. From your vantage point, how do you describe culture and relationships between staff at the school given the return to in-person instruction?
7. How do you describe culture and relationships between staff and leadership at the school given the return to in-person instruction?

Ethnic-Racial and Gender Identity in the Teaching Profession
In our last interview, we spoke about ethnic-racial and gender identities more broadly. Today, we will focus on how your identities influence specific facets of your work as a teacher so far this school year.

8. How does [insert participant self-assigned terms] influence how you engage students and their families?
i. Follow up [late career teachers- 10 years or more]: How do you compare how you engage students and their families as a [insert ethnic-racial and gender identities] now versus earlier in your career?

9. How does [insert participant self-assigned terms] influence how you interact with your colleagues or school administration?
   i. Follow up: Talk to me about the last time that [insert ethnic-racial and gender identities] came up with colleagues.
   ii. Follow up: Talk to me about the last time that [insert ethnic-racial and gender identities] came up with leadership.

**Ethnic-Racial and Gender Identity Negotiation**
10. In our last interview, I asked you to share about the last time that you felt proud or empowered more broadly as a [insert participant self-assigned terms]. Can you describe a moment in which you felt proud or empowered as a [insert participant self-assigned terms] at your school or in a professional setting?

11. There are many stereotypes and misconceptions in the media and in everyday life about [insert participant self-assigned terms]. To what extent do you see these stereotypes and misconceptions affecting you in the workplace?

12. Have you ever adjusted your language or mannerisms to fit in or accommodate others at work? If so, tell me a story the last time this happened.
   i. Follow up: How does it feel to alter your language or behavior to fit in at work? What emotions come to mind?
   ii. Follow up: Are there positive aspects or benefits to altering your language and behavior? Please explain.
   iii. Follow up: Are there negative aspects or costs to altering your language and behavior? Please explain.

13. Have you ever had a negative experience related to ethnicity, race, or gender that interfered with your ability to do your job effectively?
   a. Follow up: Have you ever considered leaving your job due to a negative experience related to ethnicity, race, or gender?
   b. What factors influence your decision to [stay/leave]?

**Decision-Making: Teacher Attrition & Turnover**
14. Have you ever considered leaving the profession?
15. What factors influence your decision to [stay/leave]?

**Final Thoughts**
16. Based on your personal experiences and observations, what can schools do to support and retain Black women educators or even teachers of color more broadly?

**Closing (Cue: “Before I Let Go” by Beyoncé)**
17. Is there anything else that you’d like to add that is relevant to this conversation?