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Counter Narratives of Black Female Educators in Exurban Schools

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COUNTER NARRATIVES OF BLACK FEMALE EDUCATORS IN EXURBAN SCHOOLS

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EDUCATIONAL STUDIES IN DIVERSE POPULATIONS

ABSTRACT

This study explored how three Black female educators characterized their personal narratives regarding their teaching experiences. Guided by a social justice framework, this study attempted to show how Black women's identities have been co-created, how their perceptions of success have been formulated, and how perceptions of academic success have helped them frame their pedagogy for diverse students. Because limited research has examined how Black female educators in exurban areas situated their perceptions and pedagogy to facilitate the needs of diverse students, this study added to the limited knowledge.

Purposeful sampling was conducted at the site and participant level. The research sites represented school districts where the teaching force was mainly White and female, the school populations were increasingly diverse, and there were limited numbers of educators who were racially, culturally, or ethnically diverse. The participants were purposefully chosen because they identified as Black female educators at these sites.

Study participants had lived experiences which mirrored those of their students. Their high self-efficacy allowed them to believe that their experienced successes were transferrable to their students (Sosa & Gomez, 2012). As they recognized and catered to the strengths rather than the weaknesses of their students, they bridged students' home life with that of the school and proved to be valuable resources to students and schools alike (Emdin, 2017; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2012).

Qualitative research was used to understand how participants constructed their words, interpreted experiences, and attributed meaning to those experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The central question in this research study was: "How do three Black female educators characterize their personal narratives as they facilitate the needs of diverse students? Using an interpretive method which considered what was seen and heard during individual interviews, the data was analyzed and coded (Lichtman, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through data analysis, research questions were addressed, and four themes were acknowledged. Direct quotes coupled with rich, thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) were used to describe participants' beliefs and experiences. From the analyzed raw data, the guiding research questions were thoroughly addressed while further questions for thought and study were identified.

Keywords: Black female educators, critical race theory, culturally responsive pedagogy, elementary education, equity pedagogy, social justice education

DEDICATION

To Daddy John and Papa Chic for the gift of land, from which the blessings flow. To John Bell, Jr. for the insistence on understanding self-worth. To Mama Vib, Granny Hettie, Grandmama Janie and Aunt Jay for the legacy of wisdom that was never meant to be included in the textbook. To Baby Liam for keeping us pure and reminding us to seize each moment. To generations of community members who battled for us though you never knew us. You are not forgotten.

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I wish to thank those students and mentors in the inaugural ESDP cohort with me. We have shared ideas, frustrations, and successes and I believe that we are all better because of it. Connected by this experience, I believe we will now begin the work that we have long discussed and desired. I also wish to thank those socially just, transformative educators who work with me daily teaching the young leaders of tomorrow. The work is hard, the rewards are few, but we are making a difference in the lives of students.

I appreciate the participants in this research study more than they will ever know. This work has been difficult and old wounds have been made fresh. The candor with which you speak, the vulnerability you display, and the passion that keeps you in this field with these students at this time has not been lost on me. You continue to care for those who would have been otherwise overlooked. If no one else tells you, you deserve to know that you are appreciated, and your work has been and continues to be paramount to the voiceless.

I am most grateful for the support system God granted me as family. To Milton and Yvonne, thank you for giving me wings to fly and believing I could. To Adrian, you know we will always have each other. To Laura and Larry, thank you for your constant encouragement and love. To my nieces and nephews, we will continue to do what is necessary so that you and other students have equitable opportunities inside and outside of the classroom setting.

Ultimately, my children are the "why" God knew I needed. To Kristian and Kourtni (along with Maxx), thank you for always believing in me, for challenging me, and for grounding me. Your unconditional love is so much more than I deserve. When all is said and done, we have each other. That has been and continues to be everything.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Third grade students giggled and clamored for the perfect spot in the impending photograph. For weeks, the students had worked diligently on their Empathy Project. This service project enabled them to help locate a neighborhood organization that needed financial or material assistance, debate the merits of the significance they could make by assisting those organizations, and solicit support from family and peers to enable such assistance. Students chose to support a local animal shelter, a nursing home, an orphanage, and the children's wing at the local hospital. They recognized the value in helping others, and each of these places was significant to them; therefore, the learning was meaningful. Standing with their groups to take this photograph was analogous to them learning the worth of their individual and collective voices to enact change in their world and the larger world around them. These students effectively learned their power to narrate their story and make a difference in their community.

From the researcher's perspective, this work was both personal and professional. I simultaneously positioned myself as a parent, educator, and student. As a parent, I learned to ensure high-quality, culturally and developmentally appropriate learning experiences (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009) for each of my children while they transitioned through elementary school, high school and college as these experiences were often absent from the mainstream curriculum. As an

educator, I learned to advocate for the students who represent the macrocultures of the changing demographics within our community, including demographics that parallel the "browning" of the country. As a student, I learned to recognize and challenge systems of oppression inherent in the educational system through activities that encourage students to first recognize and then address systems of oppression through quality educational experiences. These experiences have molded my perspective and pedagogy.

According to Vygotsky's theory (1978), children and teachers play important roles in learning. The teacher's role in learning is to actively construct experiences within Zones of Proximal Development within which children interact. These zones are defined as the distances between the child's actual development level and their level of potential development through either peer collaboration or adult guidance. In this context, learning is a collaborative and social activity. Culture is critically important within these interactions. Accordingly, students benefit when experiences at home are used to enhance their learning experiences at school (Kinkead-Clark, 2017).

The Empathy Project demonstrated socio-constructive learning for students. Designed as a hands-on educational experience, it included multiple learning opportunities for a community of learners. Those opportunities were meaningful, equitable, and inclusive for each student. Such opportunities engaged learners in constructing meaning about their immediate environment as well as the larger, outside world in which they live rather than simply receive information as empty vessels from a presumed all-knowing teacher (Freire, 1970).

Although educators are not responsible for and cannot control the multiple external forces that affect their classroom communities (e.g., employment opportunities,

environmental concerns, transportation accessibility, municipal services or housing stocks), students are directly and indirectly impacted by such forces (Siegel-Hawley, 2016). To ensure academic success for their students, educators must assume the responsibility of affording equitable opportunities for students inside the classroom, which will help them overcome or compensate for those external forces. Providing such educational experiences while countering external forces is best ensured through a social justice framework.

Social justice has been described holistically as a process and a goal (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997). The implementation of social justice offers all students the tools that are necessary to acknowledge and effect change. The authors explain that the goal of social justice is the enabled, full participation of all groups in a democratic society through equitable possession of the resources in that society. Those resources act to combat oppressions that have historically and systemically relegated some to the margins of society where they are effectively rendered invisible. Successful implementation of social justice requires knowledgeable and willing educators to enact practices that disrupt oppressive ideas.

Incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy to facilitate social justice allows educators to continuously evaluate their perceptions and adjust their pedagogical practices accordingly. Culturally responsive pedagogy includes curriculum and instruction that bridges the student's home life and values of the school and classroom (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Such practices are contextualized through the diversity of the classroom community and allow for multiple perspectives, as well as numerous representations that are reflective of the larger world. Educators and students

spend a significant amount of time together, ensuring that the students feel cared about as individuals as well as a part of a larger cultural group is essential to promoting student learning, especially when working with diverse students in power dynamics such as those that exist in schools (Nieto, 1999). Such relationships encourage and enable students to find and express their voice to recognize, construct, and convey their narrative (Mitchell, Hinueber, & Edwards, 2017).

Contextual Background

Race and ethnicity data from the United States Census Bureau indicate that 57% of the total United States population will consist of people of color by the year 2060 (Bernstein, 2012). The White population, the historically majority population since the inception of the country, is projected to slow in growth while the Black population continues to increase slightly from 2043 until 2060. During that same time, the Asian and Latinx populations are projected to more than double from current numbers (U.S. Census, 2017).

The changing demographic trends in public schools of the United States mirror those in the larger population. The U.S. school-age population contains greater proportions of racial and ethnic minorities than older White subgroups (Bryant, Triplett, Watson, & Lewis, 2017). This resulting effect is known as the "browning" of the United States population and is expected to be even more prominent in public schools in coming years. Teaching effectively to such a wide range of backgrounds demands that educators consider the social and cultural needs of their students as well as their strengths and weaknesses. To be sure, teachers of all races can effectively teach diverse students

(Mitchell, Hinueber, & Edwards, 2017); however, while numbers of White educators have limited experiences in deep cultural immersion of students of color (Emdin, 2017), Black female educators are more likely to be knowledgeable of the needs of these students due to their shared personal lived experiences (Harris-Perry, 2011; hooks, 2004). The narratives of Black female educators can add to the larger pool of knowledge about such social and cultural needs.

Purpose of the Study

Lageson (2017) demonstrated that the perceptions and pedagogical practices of the teacher are instrumental in creating socially just learning opportunities, especially for younger elementary students. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the personal narratives of a small group of Black female educators regarding their experiences of teaching as minority educators in depth. Because oral and written narratives are longstanding staples in the Black community (Ani, 1994; Harris-Perry, 2011), it is believed that such narratives explain how specific educators frame their perceptions and their pedagogy. Limited research has examined how Black female educators in exurban areas of the South situate their perceptions and pedagogy to facilitate the needs of diverse students. Thus, this study seeks to add to the limited knowledge as it lifts the voices of these educators to the mainstream conversation on valued sociocultural and pedagogical practices.

Statement of the Problem

Although prior research has investigated the ways in which race influences behavior in exurban high schools (Griffin, 2012), there is limited knowledge on the implications of how Black female educators in the exurban context situate their perceptions and pedagogy to facilitate the needs of diverse students (Griffin, 2012). This research study proposes to highlight the personal narratives of identity and academic success of Black female educators and describe how those personal narratives affect perceptions and pedagogy in exurban schools in the South.

Research Questions

The central question in the research was "How do three Black female educators characterize their personal narratives as they facilitate the needs of diverse students?" Sub-questions within this research included:

1. How do the descriptions of personal narratives from three elementary educators contribute to their personal identities?
2. How do participants describe the ways in which personal identities affect their perceptions of academic success for their students?
3. How does each participant's perception of academic success affect their pedagogy?

Theoretical Framework

Established in the legal studies domain by Derrick Bell (1980), Critical Race Theory (CRT) has since adapted to address issues of race, institutionalized racism, and

color-blind discourse in other fields such as education (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Zorn, 2018). Bell (1995) emphasized that critical theorists "seek to empower and include traditionally excluded views and see all-inclusiveness as the ideal because of our belief in collective wisdom" (p. 901). Prior research indicates even young children are aware of racial differences (Banks, 2016; Clark & Clark, 1939). Deliberate action to influence the developing views about differences is necessary to prevent negative racial attitudes from becoming ingrained in children (Aboud, Mendelson, & Purdy, 2003; Banks, 2016; Clark & Clark, 1939). Additionally, the teachers' perceptions are indicative of the types of influence the students will experience regarding issues of race and power (Greene, Burke, & McKenna, 2013). The materials used and the ways in which teachers present them largely determine the atmosphere in which students construct such information (Banks, 2016). Black female educators are uniquely situated to link experience and practice through personal narratives which address personal identity, perception of academic success, and pedagogy.

Master narratives are grounded in racist ideology, pervasive, and told in ways that generate power for specific persons or groups (Goessling, 2018). Such narratives employ the use of images and language, which further generate power for these specific groups while devaluing others (Jordan-Zachery, 2009). These stories negatively affect members of racialized groups when they are internalized (Ladson-Billings, 2009). However, liberatory potential exists through storytelling. Ladson-Billings (2009) described this as the process where one stops self-inflicting violence upon the realization of how people initially became oppressed or subjugated. The counter-narratives of the participants in this study offer such liberatory potential.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study resonates from a unique point in United States history: the general population demographics are shifting from White majority population to White minority population, while the teaching force remains approximately 82% White and female. Other demographics reflect that 6.8% of the teaching profession is Black, and 7.8% is Latinx/Hispanic (Bryant et al., 2017). Prior research has attempted to address the ways in which educators teach in culturally responsive ways, yet little research has addressed the implications of how Black female educators in exurban schools situate their perceptions and pedagogy to facilitate the needs of diverse students.

Assumptions of the Study

Prior research implied that some students fail to have their needs met by educators because those educators are either unaware or unresponsive to the needs of the students (Elish-Piper, Matthews, & Risko, 2013; Griffin, 2012; Yull, Wilson, Murray, & Parham 2018). For students to realize academic success, the researcher believes that the responsibility to address the unmet needs of such students falls upon the shoulders of other educators, especially when those educators share cultural knowledge and experience with the student. This study assumes that the personal narratives of the Black female educators in exurban schools are important to students. These personal narratives are believed to be instrumental in the construct of the personal identity of these educators. Many believe that notions of personal identity will help explain how the educators situate their perceptions of academic success for their students; further, perceptions of academic

success are believed to be instrumental in the ways in which these educators frame their pedagogy to acknowledge and address such gaps for diverse students.

All viewpoints of participants will be accepted as truthful, valid, and worthy of consideration. To increase validity, participants will verify and clarify their interview transcripts through member checking (Glesne, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Limitations of the Study

There were limitations of this study, including the researcher as the primary research instrument, a limited number of participants, and time constraints. Because the researcher was the key instrument for collecting data, there may have been bias in the analysis and subsequent interpretation of the data. Additionally, the study was limited to the small number of Black female educator participants who met the study criteria. The study was conducted over a period spanning from August to December at one exurban school system in Alabama. Thus, there may have been limitations for access to participants due to researcher and participant schedules.

Definition of Terms

African-American: For this study, a Black person living in the United States.

Black: For this study, a person is identified as Black if he/she self-identifies as such.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Teaching that includes components of the students' home life while teaching the required curriculum to establish a sense of

belonging for students (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Previously referred to as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Educator: For this study, a highly-qualified individual teaching in a public school during this research.

Empathy: A basic human capacity that refers to the ability to react or respond to another's needs. It is thought to strengthen group cooperation and cohesion (Rieffe, Ketelaar, & Wiefferink, 2010).

Equity Pedagogy: For this study, this refers to knowledge and the application of knowledge about the learning and the learner in ways that build upon the learners prior cultural, social and academic knowledge so that traditionally marginalized students have more equal learning opportunities.

Exurban: Fringe areas at the edge of larger metropolitan areas.(Berube, Katz, & Lang, 2006).

Marginalizing: Excluding or ignoring a person or a group of persons by relegation to the edge of a group; othering (Angelides & Michaelidou, 2009).

Social Justice Education: Described as both "a process and a goal" (Bell, 2007), this educational framework serves as an attempt to equitably distribute society's resources so that all groups can fully participate in a democratic society (Esposito & Swain, 2009). Contextually, social justice education refers to equitable opportunities for all students to learn and be heard (Brighouse, 2002).

Students of Color: For this study, students who self-identify as African American, Black, Asian, Native American, or Latinx.

White: For this study, people who self-identify as Eurocentric or Caucasian.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature begins with a concise historical overview of the educational experience of Blacks in the United States of America. Although in no way meant to be comprehensive, this overview allows the reader to glean an understanding of the systemic foundations, which marginalize specific people and groups. Then, the consequences of that marginalization are revealed from the perspective of a Black female educator. Next, issues of intersectionality commonly encountered by Black females are addressed. Finally, an analysis of social justice education through culturally responsive pedagogy and the ethic of care is examined as a method of addressing oppressive educational frameworks.

Historical Overview

Even though the fourth paragraph of the United States Declaration of Independence (1776) asserted in part that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights," those rights were understood to exclude specific individuals and groups of people including Black women. The freedoms and liberties that were set forth in this document were created largely by and for land-owning White men to the exclusion of essentially all others. Accordingly, certain opportunities afforded to those with specific freedoms and liberties have been evasive for

those excluded from the protections established by our Founding Fathers. These opportunities include land and home-ownership, as well as educational attainment.

Liberalists such as John Locke (1960) believed that the free man had the right to access and the freedom to use all the Earth and its fruits that he needed for his support and comfort (p. 17), including the land upon which he lived, and any items produced with his hands. To this end, White males benefitted substantially from the system of wealth-building through land acquisition and ownership. Simultaneously, the ability of Blacks to own land was rare and often discouraged (Bonekemper, 1970). The eventual coupling of tax revenue to school economics ensured that wealthy land-owners' children received the best educational opportunities to the exclusion of poor students and students of color.

Prior ideology indicated that Black people had been enslaved and thought to be "incapable of intellectual advancement; however, Davis (1981) noted that the " yearning for knowledge had always been there." (p. 101). Davis (1981) documented that Blacks petitioned Massachusetts for the opportunity to attend free schools in Boston as early as 1787. When denied the opportunity, Prince Hall established a school in his home. In 1793, ex-slave Katy Ferguson established her namesake School for the Poor.

When restricted from formal schooling alongside their White counterparts, Black people sought any available means of educating themselves, including holding secret meetings and playing school with White children (Anderson, 1988; Williams, 2005). Others appeared to have simply acquired the information they needed with ease as they went about their daily lives. Such was the experience expressed by Nat Turner's narrative (2009):

> To a mind like mine, restless, inquisitive and observant of everything that was passing…there was nothing that I saw or heard of to which my attention was not

> directed - The manner in which I learned to read and write, not only had great influence on my own mind, as I acquired it with the most perfect ease, so much so, that I have no recollection whatever of learning the alphabet, but to the astonishment of the family, one day, when a book was shewn me to keep me from crying, I began spelling the names of different objects - this was a source of wonder to all in the neighborhood, particularly the blacks - and this learning was constantly improved at all opportunities. (para. 1)

Still others were supported in their educational attainment by White adults:

> The early advocates of the education of Negroes were of three classes: first, masters who desired to increase the economic efficiency of their labor supply; second, sympathetic persons who wished to help the oppressed; and third, zealous missionaries who, believing that the message of divine love came equally to all, taught slaves the English language that they might learn the principles of the Christian religion. Through the kindness of the first class, slaves had their best chance for mental improvement. Each slaveholder dealt with the situation to suit himself, regardless of public opinion. Later, when measures were passed to prohibit the education of slaves, some masters, always a law unto themselves, continued to teach their Negroes in defiance of the hostile legislation. (Woodson, 1919, p. 2)

After Nat Turner's slave rebellion of 1831 in Southampton County, Virginia, those in power in the Union supported schools for Blacks in large cities in the North such as Boston, New York, Providence, Portland, and Philadelphia with public funds, though most southern states still limited the possibilities for educational advancement for both free and enslaved Blacks (Moss, 2009; Darnell, 2017). The free states north of Maryland allowed Blacks basic liberties such as reading and receiving payment for work (Darnell, 2017). Although the Charity schools in the North provided some education for Blacks by 1860, most Blacks (92%) still lived in the South (Darnell, 2017).

Prior to the Civil War when Black students lacked equitable access to a structured higher education system, they often self-educated communally through shared narratives, which described ways of being in churches, under trees, and in makeshift schools (Darnell, 2017). Additionally, Black communities pooled their funds to send small groups

of young children away to schools that would accept them so that they could learn to read and count. Following the Civil War, Blacks were responsible for raising money to lease land and subsequently build schools upon the land to establish their own schools. It was only after this process that the federal government would force the states to pay for the teacher in such schools (Williams, 2005; Williams & Ashley, 2004).

Northern philanthropists along with Black church leaders established the first Historically Black College and University (HBCU) when creating current day Cheyney State University in 1837 (Akbar & Sims, 2008; Newkirk, 2012). Numbers of these HBCU's were birthed after the Civil War to educate the freedmen. Since that time, these institutions of higher learning have contributed significantly to academia, providing opportunities and assistance necessary for supporting and nurturing student success (Akbar & Sims, 2008). Many of these schools were only colleges in name, which provided only elementary and secondary education as did their White counterparts (Newkirk, 2012). As groups of students mastered the primary curriculum, they were offered theological or normal training as the leaders felt ministers and teachers were most important areas to prepare the freedmen for life as citizens (Akbar & Sims, 2008; Newkirk, 2012). These schools, in the face of limitations, were responsible for "educating the first generation of post-emancipation black leaders" (Newkirk, 2012, p. 14). In fact, these schools bore the responsibility of educating approximately 90% of Blacks in college, including 85% of Black physicians, 85% of Black teachers, and 75% of Blacks with PhDs.

Vermont Representative Justin Smith Morrill introduced an educational act

to the 35th Congress in 1858. That act passed the House and the Senate and survived until President James Buchanan vetoed it, citing the constitutionality and potential infringement upon states' rights (Wheatle, 2018). The veto was perceived as an indication that the federal government would leave control of education to the states. When no less than nine states seceded from the Union, Representative Morrill capitalized on the vacated Southern seats in Congress. With the support of President Abraham Lincoln, the Morrill Land Grant was passed in 1862. The purpose of the grant was to teach military tactics, expand mechanical and agriculture arts, and teach classical studies so that large numbers of people in every state could experience higher and broader education. Newly founded land grant institutions challenged those liberal arts colleges that were already established; however, because the act gave full authority for creating institutions to the states, opportunities remained limited for Blacks (Wheatle, 2018).

The enactment of the Second Morrill Act in 1890 required that states with racially segregated public higher education systems either allow Blacks to be enrolled in traditionally White institutions of higher learning or provide land-grant institutions for Black students (Litolff III, 2007). As many of these states still refused the admittance of Blacks in traditionally White institutions, they alternatively allowed the creation of Black colleges with a portion of the funds. Much of the funds, however, were diverted to either enhance existing White institutions or to create new segregated institutions for Whites. Although these institutions created for Blacks offered courses in industrial, agricultural, and mechanical areas, they often lacked collegiate courses and degrees.

The *Plessy v. Ferguson* court decision (1896) established as law the separate but equal context, allowing the continuation of segregated public schooling. Notwithstanding,

Black women ensured that Black children were equipped for success even as the world would continue to deny them (Jean-Marie, James, & Bynum, 2006). These women worked diligently to supplement inferior equipment and facilities as well as to mentor others in their communities to ensure respect, education, and success for all (Jean-Marie, 2005). In addition to teaching community members and students how to protect themselves from the prejudice they would encounter, the women supplemented the prescribed curriculum with "community ethics" and "racial pride" (Jean-Marie, 2005; Jean-Marie et al., 2006) much in the way that Ladson-Billings (1995) described. Stanford (1997) suggested that these women worked in ways that supported a "community solidarity, community of learners, focus on the whole child, and personal accountability" (p. 108).

Albeit largely absent from the American history traditionally taught in the mainstream elementary and secondary curriculum, excellence in Black education has been exemplified through the personal narratives of notable female scholars, educators and activists such as Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Charlotte Hawkins Brown. These Black collective voices, along with the counter-narratives of numerous others, have been passed down generationally and have served as the basis of strength, determination, and perseverance within the Black community.

Anna Julia Cooper was enslaved for the first seven years of her life. During this time, mothers worked to resist dehumanization, which was inevitable. Even in the earliest years of life, survival methods were offered through "children's stories, religious lessons, and living practice from their mothers" (Hubbard, 2009, p. 286). Black mothers would blend words of support with strict discipline so that their children would obey.

Additionally, they raised their children with a strong sense of social responsibility for their community and a priority on the family (Hubbard, 2009). Cooper realized the responsibility of the Black woman as she noted:

> We are the heirs of a past which is not our fathers' moulding. Every man the arbiter of his own destiny" was not true for the American Negro of the past: and it is no fault of his that he find himself to-day the inheritor of a manhood and womanhood impoverished and debased by two centuries and more of compression and degradation. Bur weaknesses and malformations, which today are attributable to a vicious schoolmaster and a pernicious system, will a century hence be rightly regarded as proofs of innate corruptness and radical incurability. Now the fundamental agency under God in the regeneration, the re-training of the race, as well as the ground work and starting point of its progress upward, must be the *black woman.* (Cooper, 1892, p. 28)

In contrast to many Black women around her, Cooper obtained degrees from St. Augustine Normal and Collegiate Institute, Oberlin College, and the Sorbonne. During her lifetime, Cooper worked diligently to ensure that Black women were able to tell their authentic stories rather than having others tell them. She worked tirelessly as a principal, teacher, scholar and author (Robinson, 2015). Cooper criticized the church as an institution as well as Black men collectively for sexist attitudes toward Black women and their lack of support for Black women to receive higher education (Hubbard 2009).

Mary Church Terrell was sent to Yellow Springs, Ohio, for her elementary education. She later attended Oberlin Academy and Oberlin College. After graduating in 1884 and receiving the Doctorate of Humane Letters in 1948, Terrell worked at Wilberforce University for two years before obtaining a position at M Street School in Washington, D.C., for one year. She later studied Italian, French, and German for two years in Europe. Although she was thought to be the most highly trained Black woman in America for some time, she did not allow her achievements to falsely hide her position as a Black woman in America, stating the following:

> I remember distinctly the first time it dawned upon me with irresistible, crushing force that there was something radically, painfully wrong with the color of my face. After that incident it was borne in upon my mind more and more that this difference in complexion between me and the strong, white group which owned the world, the flesh and other things too numerous to mention would cause me a great deal of trouble if I didn't watch out. (Terrell, 2004, p. 26)

Thus, her life's work became the advancement of Black women through lectures and her work in organizations in the United States and abroad.

Mary McLeod Bethune's parents, Samuel and Patsy McLeod, were ex-slaves who bought their farm on which they raised their 17 children. By age 12, Mary had received her education with the assistance of a Presbyterian mission school. Even as a child, Bethune was known for her ability to resolve conflicts, organize, and look out for the needs of those around her (Long, 2011). Speaking of her early days, Bethune stated the following:

> I wanted very much, before I learned to read well, I craved some education so I could go out and help people. There was such a need for somebody to go and do something. Instinctively, I felt that leadership was needed, someone to inspire and build a program to tell people something else aside from this scantly life we were called upon to live. (Johnson, 1999, p. 41)

Bethune obtained her secondary education at Scotia Seminary. She attended Moody Bible Institute with plans of becoming a missionary in Africa ("Mary McLeod Bethune," 1955). When the Presbyterian Mission Board decided that they would not send a Black woman on a mission to Africa, Bethune endeavored to use her talents on Blacks in America. She taught at Haines Normal and Industrial Institute in Georgia where she was heavily influenced by the founder, Lucy Laney. When she moved to Florida, she established the Daytona Literary and Industrial School for Training Negro Girls with little more than $1.50, persistence, and her faith ("Mary McLeod Bethune," 1955). Using discarded materials from trash piles behind hotels and from the city dump, she furnished

the school (Long, 2011). The school later merged with Cookman Institute to become Bethune-Cookman College. Though she taught at Bethune-Cookman College for several years, her future work focused on Black women and Black children. She worked with Presidents Coolidge and Hoover on endeavors, which included those directed at feeding, educating and housing children.

Charlotte Hawkins Brown completed elementary and secondary school in Cambridge, Massachusetts, before attending the state normal school in Salem under the sponsorship of Alice Freeman Palmer (Smith, 1982). Brown worked as a teacher at a small rural school in Greensboro, NC, until the American Missionary Association withdrew its support of the school. Although Brown had the option to transfer to another school, she chose to reopen the school. She worked for approximately 40 additional years to ensure the growth of the school from a small elementary school that serviced neighborhood students to a high school and junior college that welcomed students from all over the nation. Brown raised approximately one million dollars from supporters in the North and South for the development of this school (Smith, 1982).

These are just four examples of scholar-activists who challenged long-standing deficit notions entrenched within the mainstream narratives and textbooks designed to promote Whiteness. Such textbooks reflected common accepted thoughts of the dominant culture at the time and incorrectly insisted that “nature had conferred certain immutable characteristics on each member of a racial group” and theorized that “the white or Caucasian race was considered the paragon of all races: intellectually, morally, and physically superior to all others” (Foster, 1999, p. 256). Deficit notions moderately projected a construct of Blackness that “denied personhood, thus creating an ontological

truth that non-Whites were abnormal, childlike and innately inferior to Whites" (King, 2014). Further blatant notions constructed and depicted Blacks as embodying skin which was cursed (Woodson, 1933), insisting that after God first made the Black man, He realized His error, and improved by producing sequentially lighter races (King, 2014).

As notions of Black inferiority were commonplace in White communities, it was not surprising that the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* court ruling resulted in public outcry coupled with a strategic counter-movement of White students from the public schools by some. Those students were eventually enrolled in suburban schools, religious schools, or other privately-owned schools to avoid what the parents felt would be negative consequences of impending integration with Blacks. This outward movement of White bodies from spaces which are inhabited or soon to be inhabited by people of color to spaces which are inhabited primarily by people who are White is commonly referred to as "white flight" (Duncan & Duncan, 1957; Taeuber & Taeuber, 1965). This movement occurred in many cities throughout the United States (Andrews, 2002). Sikkink and Emerson (2008) indicated that Whites collectively, regardless of educational attainment levels, were prone to share a fear of integrating their White children with Black children. Andrews (2002) acknowledged that White resistance was not necessarily directed at all Blacks but rather at those who were poor or working class; in other words, Whites were less motivated by racial than by class prejudice.

The traditional segregated public schools for Blacks tended to have faculty demographics that paralleled that of the student body. The simultaneous movement of Black bodies into historically White public schools resulted in the eventual closure of those majority Black populated segregated schools. An undesired consequence to Black

students was that they were no longer taught by educators who knew them, lived in their neighborhoods, and worshipped with them (hooks, 2004). Now, they were transported into unfamiliar places with different and often unwelcoming students, parents, and educators. Many of these people, including those in authority positions, required that these students of color abandon their self-identity for the adoption of the dominant culture standards (hooks, 2004). On the off chance these students were given voices within classroom conversations, they were often objectified and relegated to be the only voices of color within those spaces, assuming the uncomfortable role of "native informant" (hooks, 1994).

Concurrently, those educators in the segregated minority schools were disproportionately left unemployed or underemployed. From 1954 until 1965, approximately 38,000 Black teachers lost their jobs as teachers and administrators in 17 states impacted by desegregation (King, 1993). Although a principle purpose of desegregation was to increase the educational opportunities for Blacks, the realization was that Black students were effectively separated from Black teachers (King, 1993), resulting in a negative impact upon all students (Milner & Howard, 2004).

The absence of Black teachers during and after desegregation reduced the inclusion of Black teachers' perspectives regarding the education of Black students (Foster, 1993) and led to cultural incongruence between Black students and their new school environments (King, 1993). Because the perspective of the Black teacher was absent, the inclusion of the Black experience was largely lost as Black students were expected to assimilate into the dominant culture of their new schools.

Desegregation resulting from the *Brown* case partly contributed to the underrepresentation of minority educators in the United States. Approximately 82% of the teaching force in the United States remains female, middle class, monolingual, and White, while the growing body of the public school represents more diversity than ever (Bryant et al., 2017; Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004; Dharamshi, 2018; Rogers, 2013). In such an increasingly diverse society, educators are often required to teach students who differ substantially from them. Some of these educators do well in this regard while others lack the necessary cultural awareness or competence to facilitate social justice (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Still others show resistance to doing so either because their familiarity with traditional modes has bred complacency or because they are deeply invested in maintaining the status quo (Jones & Enriquez, 2009; Staples, 2010).

Regardless of the rationale, this pairing has led to troubling statistics for Black students. More than "a quarter million students were referred to police officers to receive legal consequences in 2010 for offences that once would have, in years past, simply earned them a stern talking to by school personnel" (Flannery, 2015; Ryan, Katsiyannis, Counts, & Shelnut, 2018). The connectedness of lower academic achievement for some racial groups and the racial disproportionality in discipline has been identified as a cause of the school-to-prison pipeline (Annamma, Morrison, & Jackson, 2014; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Further, the Schott Foundation for Public Education found that only 52% of Black males graduated from high school as compared to 78% of their White peers (Robinson, 2013).

Additionally, Black girls are a growing segment of the population represented in the criminal justice system, making them "a disproportionately high proportion of the more than 400,000 youth who are educated in detention and correctional facilities across the nation" (Morris, 2014). The common response to perceived disruptive behavior or defiance by Black women and girls throughout communities in the United States is to add additional victimization (Conteh & Harris-Perry, 2018). Rather than reaching out to this specific population with meaningful support, members of this group are increasingly handcuffed or arrested as early as kindergarten for throwing what would be perceived to be temper tantrums when enacted by members of other populations (Conteh & Harris-Perry, 2018). When this physical violence is enacted by school authorities, it adds but another layer to the additional physical and emotional violence often experienced by these females who are also survivors "of domestic abuse, sexual violence, childhood trauma, childhood poverty, and broken foster care systems" (Conteh & Harris-Perry, 2018, p. xiv).

More than 65 years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* court ruling, the effects of the decision are still highly influential throughout public school systems across the United States. Although the apparent intention of the decision was to encourage equitable educational opportunities for all students, the realization has been an educational system that has failed to live up to expectations for diverse and marginalized students. Rather than thoroughly integrating the cultures of these students within the mainstream curriculum in its entirety, many schools still rely upon superficial highlighting of specific persons, events, or holidays as their sole inclusionary practices (Banks, 2016). The reliance upon such traditionally taught and learned pedagogical practices of some

educators reject transformative practices and continually strip diverse students of opportunities to learn about their histories through more culturally and socially beneficial methods (Banks, 2016).

Identity, Perceptions, and Pedagogy of a Black Female Educator

Illeris (2014) described Erikson's individual identity definition as being co-created by the interaction of the individual and their social environment and how those interactions influence the individual's development. The Black female educator's identity, then, is understood as "the instance through which the development of society influences individual understandings, reactions, and way of life" (Illeris, 2014, p.152).

Many educators of color are burdened by longstanding, racial and gendered stereotypes which are easily recognized though they may not be explicitly named (Harris-Perry, 2011; Lewis & Neville, 2015; Parks, 2010). These stereotypical figures serve to identify and marginalize Black women through race and gender in comparison to White men, White women, and Black men (Jordan-Zachery, 2009). The collective of these personalities has resulted in "cultural symbols of black womanhood" that "serve to mask and normalize the inequitable position of black women" (p. 27). Jordan-Zachery (2009) necessarily identified these beings which serve to reinforce deficit characteristics of Black women as *Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire, Matriarch, Welfare Queen,* and *Urban Teen Mother*.

Mammy has been used extensively since slave times. She exists as a complex character, both servile due to her role as a domestic caretaker to White families and aggressive to maintain the status quo while protecting her White family from other

Blacks, especially Black males. The construct of Mammy as a passive, mothering nurturer who lovingly gave her all to care for her White family with little expectation of return provided a certain rationalization for the institution of slavery (Davis, 1981). Her valued lay in her role as a nurturer of the White children, constantly supervised and controlled by the White woman. The typical physical attributes of Mammy included a large body, a dark complexion with large buttocks and breasts, and the notorious smile which displayed her gleaming teeth. According to Christian (1985), Mammy has a "magnificently physical" appearance which has a specifically significant function:

> They involve the body as sensuous, as funky, the part of woman that white Southern America was profoundly afraid of. Mammy, harmless in her position as a slave and unable because of her all-giving nature to do harm, is needed as an image, a surrogate to contain all those fears of the physical female. (p. 2)

Jordan-Zachery (2009) described the *Jezebel* figure, known for her sexual aggression, as the counter-construct to *Mammy.* The promiscuity linked to the *Jezebel* signals the construct of the Black woman as a non-woman in contrast to the White woman. *Jezebel* as the "bad" woman additionally sets herself apart from *Mammy*, the "good" woman. Thus, *Jezebel* is justifiably victimized by both the Black man and the White man because she purportedly wants the attention she gets from them (hooks, 1981; Jordan-Zachery, 2009).

The *Sapphire* figure embodies a sharp tongue and serves to police Black men through nagging (Jordan-Zachery, 2009). Because she has such a domineering personality, *Sapphire* is depicted as the reason the Black man cannot lead the family unit. This explains the impoverished conditions of certain Black families. Her traits supposedly demonstrate that Black women do not embody the traits necessary for maintaining gainful employment. Additionally, the *Sapphire* character enables her

children to witness these characteristics, making them catalyst for the furthering of this cycle.

The *Matriarch* "is constructed as a bad mother who is responsible for low educational attainment, crime, delinquency of her charges, and for ostracizing black men" (Jordan-Zachery, 2009, p. 43). Constructed during the civil rights era, this figure has a home of her own, but does not possess the qualities necessary to take care of her family successfully. Rather, she is single-handedly responsible for driving the Black male out of the home, ineffectively caring for her children, and then unleashing them onto society.

The final two characters, *Welfare Queen* and *Urban Teen Mother*, stand as the more contemporary ones. Jordan-Zachery (2009) illustrated the idea of the *Welfare Queen* as immoral, greedy and selfish. She is large like Mammy, suggesting that she is well-cared for. She represents the image of a cheater who proudly receives aid only through the production of offspring. The *Urban Teen Mother* "communicates the intergenerational transmission of welfare dependency" (p. 45). Jordan-Zachery further analyzed:

> This teenage child/woman is characterized as driven by her libido and is either unwilling or unable to care for her children. Furthermore, these child/women are depicted as seducing white society into taking care of their families while shirking their own responsibilities. (p. 45)

When faced with the possible association to such negative stereotypes, Black female educators have often chosen to resist the characterization by embracing the image of the *Strong Black Woman* (Harris-Perry, 2011). The *Strong Black Woman* image stands as a pushback against the shame of other Black female stereotypes which serve to demean and degrade. Easily recognizable, Harris-Perry explained the *Strong Black Woman* image:

> She confronts all trials and tribulations. She is a source of unlimited support for her family. She is a motivated, hard-working breadwinner. She is always prepared to do what needs to be done for her family and her people. She is sacrificial and smart. She suppresses her emotional needs while anticipating those of others. She has an irrepressible spirit that is unbroken by a legacy of oppression, poverty, and rejection. (p. 21)

While the *Strong Black Woman* image demonstrates agency in contrast to negative connotations induced by other stereotypes such as *Mammy, Jezebel* and *Sapphire*, it provides further opportunities for Black women to be shamed. Even as the *Strong Black Woman* "serves as a constructive role model because black women draw encouragement and self-assurance from an icon able to overcome great obstacles" (p. 184), she also establishes that Black women should expect to be self-denying caregivers in both their homes and in their communities. Thus, these women are valued on their behavior rather than for who they are (p. 185). Expectations are that these women will effectively "handle losses, traumas, failed relationships, and the dual oppressions of racism and sexism" (Romero, 2000, p. 227). Resulting failure in these expectations is synonymous to personal failure for the woman and for those around her.

For an educator to address practices which oppress, the educator must first understand hidden power structures which support institutions of oppression (Illeris, 2014). Enacting transformative education requires collectively addressing the cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of oppressive structures which are positioned in society because they often replicate themselves in education. Each of these identities is aligned closely with Black women, so they serve to frame important social issues and further specific ideology (Harris-Perry, 2011; Jordan-Zachery, 2009). Furthermore, these images, along with the coded language used to perpetuate them, influence not only the educators with which they are aligned, but also their co-workers, administrators, and students.

Because Black women often have multiple experiences addressing specific ideologies and how the ideologies work to relegate some, they are acutely aware of ways in which they can identify and address similar issues experienced by diverse student populations. While this awareness does not deny the possibility that other educators can effectively teach diverse students, this awareness uniquely situate Black female educators to advocate for diverse students while emphasizing appropriate academic instruction for all learners and service-learning which connects the voices and lived experiences of the classroom to the larger community (Robinson, 2013). The sharing of the narrative to address the cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of such ideologies serves as "a form of psychic preservation" as it affirms the reality and maintains sanity (Cook, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Collectively, Blacks have affirmed perceptions as to the importance of education in improving the life circumstances and promoting social change for themselves and those in their community (Ani, 2013). Within the Black community, educators have historically been the largest group of professionals providing leadership. Whether in the public or private school sector, these educators have taken both the responsibility and accountability of the educational achievement of adults and children attending their schools (Siddle-Walker, 2000; Tillman, 2004). These educators have traditionally perceived of and positioned education to achieve social progress and individual enrichment (Kelly, 2010; Tillman, 2004). Prior research (King, 1993) has affirmed that "the presence of African American teaching philosophies and pedagogies embraces perspectives and practices that affirm the importance of education and the relationship of education to the academic, political, social, and economic success and advancement of

African Americans" (p. 117). Additional research has indicated that many Black teachers have expected that each student, regardless of class or status, could succeed (Alexander & Miller, 1989). Therefore, successful pedagogical practices of Black teachers are uniquely positioned to contribute to the successful education of diverse students (King, 1993).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is experienced in many ways for Black females (Crenshaw, 1991). There are important, historically relevant instances in which White women worked in solidarity with their Black sisters. Prudence Crandall defended the rights of Black girls to attend her school in Canterbury, Connecticut. When White parents restricted their students from attending alongside the Black girls, Crandall continued to teach until she was jailed (Davis, 1981). Margaret Douglass was imprisoned in Norfolk, Virginia when she operated a school for Black students; Myrtilla Miner sought to establish a Black teacher's college in Washington, D.C., after she had already illegally taught Black children in Mississippi (Davis, 1981).

Even so, there were other occasions that allowed the ugliness of color to alter sisterly bonds. Elizabeth Cady Stanton had joined in the fight for the rights of women and the abolishment of slavery. However, notions of solidarity diminished substantially when slaves in the South were emancipated. Not only was Stanton no longer aligned with her Black female counterparts, she actively campaigned against suffrage for Blacks (Davis, 1981).

Although being a minority female educator is sometimes viewed as a double-disadvantage (Raccah-Addi, 2005) the intersectionality of factors such as race and gender may provide a deeper understanding of perception on the part of Black female educators (Witherspoon & Mitchell, 2009). The perceptions of these educators include the internal self-perception related to the individual and external self-perception related to the individual's interaction to the surrounding world (Illeris, 2014).

The internal self-perception includes the histories educators bring to their pedagogy (Agee, 2004; Zancanella, 1991). Understanding the pedagogy of these educators necessarily means understanding their histories (Goodson, 1992) as well as how those histories assist the educators in constructing unique identities as teachers, even as these identities are contextually negotiated and re-negotiated (Agee, 2004). The external self-perceptions exist in the Self which is "constructed among shifting social contexts that make demands on an individual's agency, social responsibility, and ethical positioning" (Agee, 2004; Gergen, 1989). The agency of the individual is viewed by Shotter (1989) as a constructed Self, responding to the sense of the Other. The Black female educators' identity, constructed in relation to their community, school, colleagues, and students, often differ from White educators for multiple reasons.

One reason that the Black female educators' identity differs is that the problems they face are commonly hidden within deeply embedded discourse used in teacher education. Thus, these educators encounter ideologies which are steeply entrenched within traditional mainstream curriculum though they lack clarity on teaching as a political act (Bartolome' & Trueba, 2000). Frequently, they are positioned as outsiders regarding what counts in society and in school (Agee, 2004). The dominant discourse of

mainstream curriculum forces the realization that much of the research and theory on multicultural literature assumes that the educator is White. (Agee, 2004). Under the context of this single perspective, the experiences of Black educators as well as other educators of color are made invisible as there are few references and discussions about how educators of color are positioned to question such standards of best practice within which they are largely absent (Agee, 2004; Delpit, 1995).

Another reason the Black female educators' identity differs is that racial bias often positions the Black educators' approach toward multicultural education for diverse students differently than their White counterparts. To be sure, the Black female educator's approach is routinely regarded as lacking as indicated by Ladson-Billings when a White male colleague claimed that "he could probably address or teach race, class, and gender more successfully than she, a Black teacher, because students would perceive his approach as scholarly; whereas they would see a Black teacher as self-interested, bitter, or having a political agenda" (Agee, 2004, p. 750).

As Black educators engage within the task of addressing issues which directly affect them on the professional realm, they are simultaneously expected to prepare students of color to "meet racial hostility through a process of socialization meant to negate harmful images of blackness and replace them with role models of courage, resilience, and achievement" (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 102). Prior research by Cook (2013) reveals that Black educators not only deal with the regular demands of teaching but that they are also relegated to serve "as the proxy for all African Americans and thus must take responsibility for educating not only students of color within their public school but also their peers (teachers, counselors, and administrators) about issues of race of equity"

(p. 46). *The Bridge Poem* (Rushin, 1981) communicates the burdens of Black women as they attempt to serve the needs of others before serving their own personal needs:

> I explain my mother to my father/ my father to my little sister/ My little sister to my brother/ my brother to the white feminists/The white feminists to the Black church folks/ the Black church folks to the ex-hippies/ the ex-hippies to the Black separatists/ the Black separatists to the artists/the artists to my friends' parents… Then/ I've got to explain myself/To everybody

It is only at the end of the representative literary work that the reader is made aware of the needs of the author:

> The bridge I must be/ Is the bridge to my own power/ I must translate/ My own fears/Mediate/ My own weaknesses/I must be the bridge to nowhere / But my true self/ And then/ I will be useful.

While attempting to facilitate the high-quality education of all students, these educators often face dilemmas which are addressed according to their perceptions and their identity. One such dilemma is that they are evaluated by teacher rubrics which are positioned to downplay or ignore important pedagogical factors such as "political clarity, oppositional consciousness and sense of urgency, and connectedness" that are all engrained within the historic and contemporary lived experiences of African descended people (Acosta, 2018, p. 26). The burden then becomes intersectional as these educators represent diversity in their respective institutions even as they battle becoming "complicit" in facilitating structures they have been engaged in destroying.

Still another dilemma faced by Black female educators lies in social assimilation expectations. As the core of upward mobility within the educational profession is social in nature, Black women are expected to acknowledge and adhere to the norms of those of other cultures including socializing in events, institutions, and organizations which are not represented within their own communities (Glazer-Ramo, 2001). When attempting to

engage within such public realms, Black women—as members of a stigmatized group contending with hypervisibility imposed by perceived lower social status—are commonly misrecognized as "other." This is highlighted by the symbolic identification of a Black woman as "the odd one at your Sunday Brunches" (Harris-Perry, 2011; Rushin, 1981).

Even when expected to master such expectations, the voices and concerns of these women are often lost in the plethora of ideas and agendas of others. Research suggests that Black female educators can utilize a social justice framework as a binary tool to address issues which affect them as they simultaneously address the issues which also affect their diverse students (Bell, 2007).

Social Justice Education

One of the most important responsibilities in the educational system is teaching reading and writing (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1979). Lack of experience in acquiring reading and writing skills is often mistaken as lack of ability for numbers of very young students initially entering school (Allington,1994). Quite often, these students are subsequently branded immature, at-risk, developmentally delayed, or limited ability (McGill-Franzen, 1992). Once in school, the literacy activities designed to engage such students are often limited to low-level expectations and serve to restrict the actual reading experiences and opportunities in which these students can engage (Allington, 1994). The test results of these students when compared with their peers is frequently referred to as the achievement gap and disproportionately identifies students of color as lacking (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Accordingly, more than 50 years after desegregation efforts were initiated through the *Brown vs. Board of Education* court ruling, numbers of

students of color continue to find themselves misunderstood, mislabeled, and miseducated due largely to the resistance to change to social justice practices in reading and writing (Williamson, 2017). The *Brown vs. Board of Education* court ruling in 1954 was the landmark decision that indicated that the racial segregation of students in public schools in the United States was unconstitutional.

Social justice practices would include rejecting "deficit notions of students' identity and literary practices, and working toward re-envisioning the normal in the classroom as intersections of students' multiple worlds of culture, language, experience, and potential" (Simon & Campano, 2013, p. 23). In the classroom, re-envisioned counter-practices would encourage students to draw upon unique experiences and interests which give insight into their culturally-based knowledge rather than insisting that all students engage in similar activities (Simon & Campano, 2013). A specific example would be the substitution of books which feature dominant culture main characters in favor of award-winning picture books which feature diverse characters that provide realistic views of students as they are and as they can be (Martinez, Koss, & Johnson, 2016) Another example includes replacing the top-down approach to curriculum with a student-interest model in which learning followed the student's emerging sense of fairness about issues which directly concern them (Simon & Campano, 2013). Allowing students opportunities to address such issues enables them to change the ways in which they view themselves and their futures. Still another example is the inclusion of stories of excellence from diverse backgrounds within the curriculum to counter derogatory racial images (Harris-Perry, 2011). In such stories, students can form fictive kinships in which they are

connected to the positive accomplishments to others who are "unrelated by blood or marriage but who nonetheless share reciprocal social or economic relationships" (p. 102).

The link between literacy testing and perceived success of schools is strong. Prior research has revealed that high-stakes testing has a significant impact upon school systems and teachers (O'Neill, 2003) and focuses heavily on tested subject areas such as reading at the expense of other subject areas (Smyth, 2008). It is important that even in the wake of such testing mandates and consequences, educators continue to provide their students opportunities within the curriculum to engage in experiences which value them and their respective cultures, allow for creativity, innovation, higher-order thinking, and a variety of teaching strategies which benefit all students (Borden-Hudson, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2004). However, many students continue to encounter educational experiences which relegate them "invisible" in the margins of academic success (Elish-Piper, Matthews, & Risko, 2013).

To address traditional systems of oppression in society at large, John Rawls (1993) advocated for social justice as fairness. Under the principles of justice envisioned by Rawls, each person should have equal rights to the most extensive liberties consistent with another's liberties. Inequalities should be arranged to everyone's advantage.

According to Bell (2007), social justice education serves as a process and a goal that is "democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change" (p. 2). This educational framework serves as an attempt to equitably distribute society's resources so that all groups can fully participate in a democratic society (Esposito & Swain, 2009). In this context, social justice education refers to the concept of equitable opportunities for all

students to learn and have their voices included in the mainstream discourse (Brighouse, 2002).

Teaching through a social justice lens often involves the envisioning of educational spaces that are distinctly different from those the educators have been traditionally taught in (Gove, Volk, Still, Huang, & Thomas-Alexander, 2011; Rojas & Liou, 2017). These newer classrooms are more interactive for participants and provide differentiated instructional opportunities which cater to the strengths rather than the perceived weaknesses of its members (Nieto, 2012). The educators are often act as activist who encourage students to see past barriers and limitation (Simon & Campano, 2013). Within these spaces, busywork is eliminated as collaboration among peers is encouraged. Educators seek to understand and subsequently highlight their students' sociocultural realities.

Regardless of the personal histories of the educators or the ways in which oppressions have been present or absent in their personal lives, educators are uniquely able to identify themselves and position themselves as social justice advocates (Sonu, Oppenheim, Epstein, & Argarwal, 2012). For educators to most effectively teach children, they must recognize and evaluate their perspectives first and adjust their practice accordingly (Jones & Enriquez, 2009). As educators are personally situated at unique locations within larger political and social structures (Butler, 2003), they must acknowledge and analyze power and privilege that exists both within and surrounding the classroom while simultaneously recognizing that unique thoughts and experiences of all participants are active within the context of social justice education (Fine, 1998).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Gay (2002) defined culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) as "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 106). This includes traditions, language, values, relationship norms, and learning styles (Gay, 2002). This pedagogy is keenly important for two groups of students: those students currently living in the United States who are perceived as underachieving and those anticipated to arrive in the United States (Rychly & Graves, 2012). It is believed that students currently living in the United States may appear to be underachieving due to the cultural differences which exist between the ways in which they learn best compared to the ways in which they are taught (Rychly & Graves, 2012).

> Culturally responsive pedagogy is noted to differ from multicultural education: Education that is multicultural can be delivered to a classroom containing students from the same culture; the content presented is representative of various cultural perspectives. Culturally responsive pedagogy, on the other hand, must respond to the cultures actually present in the classroom. It connects new information to students' background knowledge, and presents the information in ways that respond to students' natural ways of learning. Multicultural education may be a heading under which culturally responsive pedagogy exists. Culturally responsive pedagogy is one means to the ultimate objective of multicultural education for all. (Rychly & Graves, 2012, p. 2)

It is believed that students learn best when they are engaged in their learning and their learning environment. Engagement is augmented when students feel validated as participants in their learning community; they feel capable of learning when the information they are learning and the methods by which they learn are culturally responsive to them (Gay, 2002).

Utilizing CRP within the classroom bridges a student's home culture with that of the school (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This pedagogical method rejects traditional banking

pedagogy which sought to simply deliver information from the teacher to the student (Freire, 1970). Rather, it includes the components of the students' home life such as language, art, and music while teaching the required curriculum. Thus, each student can establish a sense of belonging as the valuing of their experience is included within the classroom community.

Each student is provided ownership of learning as power is redistributed equitably within the classroom setting (Lee, 2014; Maulucci, 2013). It is of utmost importance for educators to understand that CRP goes far beyond superficial measures such as forming better relationships and participating in sing-alongs or chants. Rather, it links the pedagogy to social justice through an ethic of caring (Esposito & Swain, 2009). Educators within this framework "cared about whether or not their students faced discrimination and racism, and they wanted to utilize education as a site of liberation" (p. 39).

The Ethic of Care

Apple and Christian-Smith (1991) indicated that the relationship between power and education is manifest in the "struggles by women, people of color, and others …to have their history included in the curriculum" (p. 2). Research has revealed that educators have sought ways for engaging students by bring their interest and voices into mainstream conversations (Agee, 2004; Sanacore, 2004). Students knowing that adults care about them help them to form trusting relations and helps form essential foundations for learning (Sanacore, 2004). Contemporary students experience increased challenges in their personal lives including dynamic family structures, personal conflicts, and

deteriorating mental health conditions (Sanacore, 2004). Accordingly, genuine caring has been identified as a specific, successful way to enhance student achievement (Gilligan, 1982; Sanacore, 2004; Roberts, 2010). Gilligan (1982) expressed that the ethic of care contains the following:

> The ideals of human relationship, the vision that the self and the other will be treated as of equal worth, that despite differences in power, things will be fair; the vision that everyone will be responded to and included, that no one will be left alone or hurt. (p. 63)

Noddings (2002) expounded upon this description by Gilligan to include that two seemingly similar students in a classroom community could require much different forms of care from the teacher. Teacher care includes understanding the needs, desires, and nature of students while understanding the power structures which signify that one party is a member of a group that has historical domination or power over the other. This caring is "embedded in reciprocal relationships and requires a certain amount of trade in kind" (Noddings, 2002). Such awareness positions the teacher to address the varying cultural and educational needs of diverse students (Roberts, 2010).

Prior research has revealed that the Black teacher care pedagogy prior to *Brown vs. Board of Education* was characterized by a singlemindedness in including culturally relevant pedagogy within the classroom while simultaneously holding unwaveringly high expectations for students, participating and living within the surrounding community, serving as intercessors for students, and introducing socio-political critiques which directly concerned the students (King, 1993; Siddle Walker, 2000). Just as marginalized students pre-*Brown* benefitted from such acts of care, current research suggests that contemporary students may indeed benefit from similar pedagogical approaches (Roberts, 2010).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY/RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative research method was chosen for this project because it is descriptive, interpretative, and subjective. This type of research has origins with anthropology and includes observing what was naturally occurring to the people and places within the study through observations, interviews and analysis of documents and artifacts. It allows for engagement with participants through in-depth interviews. Qualitative research is used to understand how people construct their words, interpret experiences, and attribute meaning to those experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Narrative qualitative research empowers individuals to share their personal stories and allow their voices to be heard (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Narrative Inquiry

In this study, the researcher sought to determine how Black female educators teaching in exurban elementary schools characterize their personal narratives. Guided by a social justice framework, this study attempts to show how Black women's identities have been co-created, how their perceptions of success have been formulated, and how perceptions of academic success have helped them frame their pedagogy for diverse students. Rather than following a set of linear steps, Clandinin (2013) suggests that narrative inquiry is "fluid" (p. 33). Narrative inquiry research was used for this study

because it "is best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single individual or the lives of a small number of individuals" (Creswell & Poth 2018, p. 71). Explained further by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry

> is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. Simply stated…narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (p. 20)

The central question in this research study is the following: "How do three Black female educators characterize their personal narratives as they facilitate the needs of diverse students?" Sub-questions included within this research included the following:

1. How do the descriptions of personal narratives from three elementary educators contribute to their personal identities?
2. How do participants describe the ways in which personal identities affect their perceptions of academic success for their students?
3. How does each participant's perception of academic success affect their pedagogy?

Philosophical Assumptions

Within the context of qualitative research, narrative studies are considered a popular "field in the making" (Chase, 2005). Narrative research has origins in literature, history, anthropology, sociolinguistics, sociology, and education. Narratives are stories told from individuals about the individuals lived as well as told experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The narratives may materialize as stories told to the researcher or as a story

that is constructed between the researcher and the participant through the dialogue and interaction of the researcher and the participants (p. 68-69). The "narrative stories tell of individual experiences, and they may shed light on the identities of individuals and how they see themselves" (p. 69).

In diverse inquiries, experience is a key term (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) that "permits better understandings of educational life (p. 2). Narrative inquiry, influenced heavily by John Dewey, is thought to be both social and personal with each ever-present. Further, Dewey insists that continuity is a criterion of experience: experiences both lead to and grow out of experiences. "Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum—the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future—each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2).

In this study, oral personal narratives about ways of being were gathered from participants to determine "the personal reflections of events and their causes and effects from several individuals" (Plummer, 1983). The teacher knowledge sought in this study are expected to enable the writing of storied accounts of their educational lives as expressions of individual as well as social stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These histories are guided by an interpretive social justice framework which advocates for disrupt the dominant discourse around the continued marginalization of educators and students of color within elementary academic settings (Muncey, 2010).

Methodological Rationale

For this research, qualitative methods were utilized because the issue of Black educators ensuring social justice for diverse students within exurban schools needed to be

explored. The benefit to using this design was that it provided understanding of the complexity of the case. Most humans understand their social reality through narratives (Bell, 1987); thus, it is "an effective vehicle for constructing new knowledge and insight that challenges dominant discourse and ways of knowing" (Cook, 2013, p. 47). Additionally, the descriptive profiles offer a realistic picture of the various perceptions and practices being researched.

Sample and Setting

After IRB approval, purposeful sampling was used to select the participants in this research. Patton suggested the following about purposeful sampling:

> The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich* cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. (Patton, 1990, p. 169)

This sampling method ensured the inclusion of individuals who could best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Purposeful sampling for this study was conducted at the site level and the participant level. The research sites selected for this research represent school districts which parallel the changing demographics in the larger United States public education system: the teaching force at each school is mainly White and female, the school populations are increasingly diverse, and there are small numbers of educators within the system who are racially, culturally, or ethnically diverse. Each school site is exurban to a larger metropolitan area in Alabama. The participants were chosen based on their identification as Black female elementary educators currently working with diverse students in these exurban schools.

A recruitment letter was given to each potential participant (See Appendix B). The recruitment letter explicitly detailed the research purpose, time frame, confidentiality and methods of data collection. My contact information as the principal investigator was included. The small sample size of three participants provided a comprehensive and thorough perspective (Stake, 2010). Each of the participants was considered a highly qualified educator by their respective schools at the onset of the research. They ranged in age from mid-30s to mid-60s and had a collective 55 years of experience teaching at the elementary school level. Each participant held a bachelor's degree; two of the participants hold master's degrees. It is significant to note that although the participants in this study were Black female educators, their lived experiences did not indicate they were monolithic. The difference in marital status, age, and life experience offered consideration of issues from multiple perspectives (Hatch, 2002; Lichtman, 2013; Merriam, 1998). Each of the participants was given the list of questions prior to each interview so that they could consider their responses thoughtfully.

Pseudonyms were assigned to participants so that quotes could be connected to participants and confidentiality could be ensured.

Participant A - Maya

At the onset of the research, Maya was a 65-year-old elementary counselor. She had been employed in this position for 18 years. Although she did not have children of her own, she had played a significant role in raising relatives. She was not born around the school in which she worked, but she moved with her family to the area when she was five years old. She attended kindergarten in the local community. Her memories offered a

unique perspective to this research as she was one of the first Black students to integrate her elementary school when she was in the fifth grade. Vivid were her memories of differences experienced through her matriculation through school.

Participant B - Toni

Toni was a 54-year-old elementary educator. She grew up in the local community in which she worked. She self-identified as a mother, a wife, a sister and friend. At the time of the initial interview, she had been in this position for 28 years. She began pre-kindergarten with a family friend as her teacher. She recalls vividly that those earliest memories were affectionate ones where she modeled the teaching style of her family friend.

Participant C - Michelle

Michelle was in her mid-30s and was employed as a special education teacher. She grew up in a local community which borders that community in which she worked at the time of the study. She had been in this position for seven years. She self-identified as "a wife and mother of three kids." Her earliest memories included visions of becoming a teacher.

Data Collection

IRB procedures were followed for this study. The researcher acted as gatekeeper for the research, which occurred over a single academic semester in the fall. After IRB approval for research was obtained, an invitation to participate in the research was sent to

each participant. This letter detailed the project and explained ethical considerations, including the rights of the participants before, during and after the research project. Because participants responded within two weeks, it was unnecessary to follow-up the letter with a phone call. A copy of the actual interview questions and a copy of the journal prompts were sent to participants once they agreed to participate in the research, so they were aware of the focus of the study.

The data collection phase of the study relied upon structured interviews with the participants. Each participant was interviewed twice during the study. Each of the approximately hour-long interviews was conducted at locations and times chosen by the each of the participants. This ensured participants were more comfortable with the process and that their anonymity was protected. The interview protocol was based on the central research question as well as the sub-questions. Additional probing questions were included as an attempt to understand perspectives and as a natural response to unexpected information. I audio recorded and transcribed the interviews verbatim.

Participants were additionally asked to use an electronic journal to reflect at least weekly upon their practice and any research related information as it occurs to them during this study. For the journaling portion, participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. Were there any unique experiences encountered based on your perspective as a Black female educator in an exurban school?
2. Describe the experience. Be sure to include how you perceived the experience and how you think it may have been experienced differently by others.
3. How was this experience connected to other past experiences?

4. How is this experience significant for diverse students?

It was expected that commonality among participants can be noted through the journaling. Due to the unforeseen lack of data obtained through journaling, the journal prompts were included as part of second interview protocol so that the data which was sought through journaling was included.

The date and time of the second interview was scheduled after transcription and proof reading of the initial interview by participants. The second interviews coincided with the midpoint of the research. The second set of interviews was approximately an hour long and was used to further examine the experiences encountered by each of the participants.

Data Analysis

"Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned" (Glesne, 1999, p.130). Thus, the researcher is required to make interpretations (Lichtman, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Those interpretations are based on the analytical lens and, subsequently, the types of filters that cover those lens (Saldana, 2009). Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data collection to ensure the ability to focus and shape the study as it proceeded. Consistent reflection on the data occurred through writing memos and applying rudimentary coding schemes that revealed commonalities among participant responses as they were received (Glesne, 1999).

During and after transcription, themes were identified as they emerged through a process of coding, or reducing the data into meaningful, named segments (Creswell &

Poth, 2018). Further, writing in the personal journal and applying simple coding schemes helped the researcher learn from and to concurrently manage the information as it was received. Writing memos, or short phrases that occurred to the reader regularly ensured that preliminary thoughts were recorded as they occurred. This freed the researcher's mind for new perspectives and thoughts as they occurred (Glesne, 1999). The inclusion of memos helped track the development of ideas throughout the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As described by Glesne (1999), simple coding schemes kept during the early days of the research helped me develop more relevant questions. The narrowing and shaping of the focus helped the researcher determine what was emerging from the work as well as the areas of the study which were underdeveloped. Subsequent data analysis ensured that connections could be made among the participant stories. Classifying and categorizing these connections was a progressive process that led to clarification of themes and the creation of an organizational framework. Data transformation occurred as the researcher relied upon field notes and interview transcripts to allow the data to "speak."

For this research, I conducted three initial interviews and three follow-up interviews. Non-verbal indicators were included in my notes and became a valuable part of the data analysis. I transcribed the audio-recorded interviews verbatim as soon as possible following each interview. Utilizing an interpretive method, I analyzed the data set (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lichtman, 2013). With a focus on the research questions, I read each piece of raw data multiple times so that I was familiar with the data set. Resulting recurring phrases were highlighted and copied onto index cards and extra-large post it notes. Phrases were then sorted and coded. The coded phrases were then analyzed

and sorted into themes and then sub-themes. This process was repeated until the data was exhausted and no new themes or codes were found. The following themes were identified: oral narratives, perceptions, actions, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Validity and Reliability

Trustworthiness was ensured by the researcher by engaging in prolonged engagement with the participants and by persistent observation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) determined that this prolonged engagement provides scope to the research as persistent observation provides depth. Time spent in the field interviewing, observing and building relationships with participants contribute to trustworthiness. Heightened awareness of researcher personal biases and subjectivity related to trustworthiness as well. Keeping a personal journal during the research process allowed the researcher to keep extract personal bias and subjectivity throughout the process.

The researcher communicated with each participant after the study so that member-checking could occur. Member checking with participants through the sharing of interview transcripts and drafts of the final report ensured the researcher's interpretation of the participants' experiences was accurate. The act of "taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261) ensured that a critical role in the research for the participants because they were asked "how well the ongoing data analysis represents their experience" (Stake, 1995, p. 115).

Ethical Concerns and Credibility

Because codes of conduct and ethical principles should be implemented in research, I sought and received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Alabama in Birmingham prior to beginning research. The purpose of the IRB is to evaluate the proposed research to protect the participants' rights. After receiving IRB approval, I recruited participants for the study through a recruitment letter (see Appendix B) which highlighted ethical principles such as the rights of participants. Included within these rights were voluntary participation, disclosure of any aspects of the research that could affect participant well-being, and the right to stop participation at any time during the research (Glesne, 1999). The carefully worded letter indicated the significance of the participant's voice in the research as the diversity of voices was important.

One ethical consideration for this study related to the right of the participants to gain something from the study (Glesne, 1999). Although no tangible incentives were provided for participation in the research, I believe that participants would experience personal satisfaction as what was learned through participation might better prepare other educators and policy-makers of the profound implication of including the voices of Black female educators within those conversations from which they are currently commonly excluded. As the principal investigator for this research, I reiterated the value of the participant's voice in the research by "acknowledging how important their time, cooperation, and words are" and by expressing the dependence of the research upon what participants had to offer (Glesne, 1999). Participants chose the location and time of the interviews and the observations.

Another ethical consideration related to the privacy of the participants. Privacy is considered an issue of utmost concern in research (Glesne, 1999). Participants have an expectation that the information they disclose during interviews and observations will be protected by anonymity. In accordance with this expectation, I did not discuss specifics of what was heard or seen during the research process with others. Additionally, I chose to use fictitious names and to change descriptive characteristics of participants (specific job titles as well as specific school sites) to protect anonymity.

Role of the Researcher

As a Black female educator in an exurban school, I bring multiple perspectives to the research. I have lived experiences in the research sites as a parent, an educator, and a researcher-learner. As a parent, I engaged in decision-making that directly related to the education of my children; as an educator, I engage in creating and implementing policy that relates to the learning environment and objectives of students; as a researcher-learner, I respond to all the aspects of research findings. Realizing that the perceptions, biases, and values that I possess in each of these capacities could influence the research, I will keep a personal journal throughout the data collection process. As I journal, I will ensure that I interpret data reflexively and maintain the ability to extract personal opinions from those of the participants.

Summary

This chapter contained a comprehensive discussion of the qualitative research approach used to study three participants' perspectives characterizing their personal narratives as they facilitate the needs of diverse students. Procedures utilized throughout the study were discussed. The chapter began with an explanation of qualitative research approach, narrative inquiry and philosophical assumptions. Then, the methodological rationale was detailed. Next, the sample and site were described. Data collection and analysis techniques were explained. Strategies utilized to protect authenticity and trustworthiness of the data including prolonged engagement with participants and persistent observation were presented. Finally, ethical concerns, credibility, and the role of the researcher were discussed in-depth.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study was designed to explore how Black female educators teaching in exurban elementary schools characterize their personal narratives. Guided by a social justice framework, this study attempts to show how Black women's identities have been co-created, how their perceptions of success have been formulated, and how perceptions of academic success have helped them frame their pedagogy for diverse students. The participants were purposefully chosen because they were Black female educators in exurban elementary schools in Alabama. The central question in this research study was the following: "How do three Black female educators characterize their personal narratives as they facilitate the needs of diverse students?" Sub-questions within this research included the following:

1. How do the descriptions of personal narratives from three elementary educators contribute to their personal identities?
2. How do participants describe the ways in which personal identities affect their perceptions of academic success for their students?
3. How does each participant's perception of academic success affect their pedagogy?

Themes and Sub-Themes

Using an interpretive method which considered what was seen and heard during individual interviews, the data was analyzed and coded in search of themes (Lichtman, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each piece of data was read multiple times to become thoroughly familiar with the data. Recurring phrases that emerged were highlighted in the transcription. Phrases were sorted and then coded. The coded notes were analyzed and organized into themes and subsequent sub-themes that described the perspectives of the participants. This process was used to develop questions for the subsequent interview. After the second interview, the process was repeated until all the data was exhausted, and no additional codes or themes were found. The resulting themes were identified along with additional sub-themes.

Table 1

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Sub-Themes
Oral Narratives	Spiritual Beings
	Community as a Village
	Success
	Marginalization
	Counter-Narratives of Resiliency
Perceptions	Stereotypes
	Race
	Gender Issues
	Intersectionality
	Monolithic Experiences
	Invisibility
Actions	
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	Differentiation
	Lived Experiences of Students
	Lived Experiences of Educators
	Relationships
	Representation
	Responsibility
	Ethic of Care

In response to the first sub-question, "How do the descriptions of personal narratives from three elementary educators contribute to their personal identities?" the analyzed data indicated that the participant educators' identities have been co-constructed through oral narratives handed down to them and those co-created by them. The oral narratives they inherited from family and community members were primarily related to ways of being and have served to mold their personal identities while counter-narratives created in response to narratives which were unacceptable to the participants served to disrupt identities projected onto them by others. Themes identified through analyzing the oral narratives by participants include spiritual beings, the community as a village, success, and marginalization. The theme identified through counter-narratives constructed by participants to address obstacles to their success include resiliency.

Oral Narratives

Spiritual beings. Early in the research, each of the participants identified as spiritual beings. When asked about the oral narratives that contributed to her personal identity, Maya responded that "preachers" were the first group of people revered within her community. She further identified as a person who was a proud member of her church.

Similarly, Toni stated, "I'm spiritual. I believe in God." She described that she "served" as a wife and mother and was "called" to teach. She described how her private prayers for students were worded. She prayed the following:

> that you would have an educator that felt like they were there to meet your needs because that's important. That you come into a classroom where an educator is wearing a smile, ready to greet you with a hug, just ready to learn about you, your

likes, your dislikes. Even if you're going through something, somebody there to listen to you.

Michelle responded that one thing that differed from her upbringing and the contemporary upbringing of several of her students was the impact of prayer in their lives. She stated, "I'm so thankful that I had a praying family." She also indicated that her transition from another career into education was paved by God. She reflected, "…it just kind of all fell in place. You know sometimes God has a plan for you. When you walk within that pathway, He just kind of makes all of the doors just fall open. And so that's what it did for me."

The community as a village. Each of the participants grew up in the area in which they taught at the time of this study. Each had strong ties to the community, a personal connection and longstanding desire to become an educator, and a deep-seeded interest in helping their students achieve success both inside and outside of the classroom.

Maya reflected as a sixty-five-year-old, elementary counselor at the onset of this research study. She had been employed in this position for almost twenty years and was preparing to retire. Although she was not born near the school in which she worked, she moved with her family to the area when she was five years old. At the age of five, she attended segregated kindergarten in the local community. The teacher in that kindergarten class was a family friend. Maya's memories offered a unique perspective to this research as she was one of the first Black students to later integrate her elementary school when she was in the fifth grade.

Although Maya did not have children of her own, she played a significant role in "raising" relatives. She expressed being a part of a "village" that contributed to her value

system, which included obtaining a quality education and helping to raise family members when their parents were not able or capable to do so.

When Maya discussed her identity, she connected herself to her community through narratives which highlighted. She said, “The things that I like…who lives in my household with me…what type of movies I like…siblings…” Overwhelming, she linked her identity with her profession: “Well, most times I identify myself with my occupation. So, I do say that I'm a school counselor.” She went further to note her long-standing professional connection to the community as she stated, “this is where my experience began.” Further, she reflected,

> Well…. I often tell my students you usually go with the occupations that you know. And, in my community, I knew preachers, teachers, nurses, coal miners, and maybe people who worked at the phone company, but predominantly it was those four. So, from that point on, you know, once I met my first-grade teacher, I wanted to be a teacher.

Later, when attending a newly integrated elementary school, the custodian at the school began acting as a disciplinarian of the Black students. Maya recalled that her response to him and his actions was that “you still had that village that was looking out for you, telling you how to act so we couldn’t really be ourselves.”

At the time of this study, Toni was a 54-year-old elementary educator. This was her 30th year in this position. She, too, reflected that she was nearing the end of her educational career in the capacity of an elementary educator at this site. She, along with a brother and a sister, grew up in the local community in which she worked. Her father was a coal miner and her mother worked outside the home “for a little while.” Self-identified as a mother, a wife, a sister and a friend; she further connected her education and her community:

> First, I think it was my calling because I started teaching my stuffed animals at a young age. And then at the age of about two or three, I started going to pre-school with a family friend where she was the teacher. So, I think a lot of my teaching style was modeled after her.

Michelle was a special education teacher in her mid-thirties at the onset of this study. She had been in this position for seven years. She self-identified as "a wife and mother of three kids." "And I'm an educator. And all of these other things...but I also see myself as strong, but I'm weak at the same time. I have flaws, but I am courageous. I'm brave. I'm a helper. I'm a mentor."

Michelle grew up in a local community which borders the community in which she worked at the time of the study. "I graduated in the year of 1998 with a total of 39 people in my class. It was very, very small. We all knew each other. We knew each other's families, what we liked to do, what we didn't like to do. It was kind of like a small knit group that we had."

Further discussion with this participant led to the following revelation about the strong ties with and the support from her family:

> I'm so thankful that I had a praying family...because if I grew up in today's society, I don't really think I would have made it because its social media and peer pressure...and not to say that we didn't have all of that because we did…I know and I understand that I had a solid foundation and parents who cared...and who prayed. And grandparents who supported, and prayed, and cared. I think just ...life in general, you know. I was raised in a loving family.

Echoing the words of Maya, she also described a similar, strong connection with the community:

> I'm from a small town where everybody knew everybody and you got a whipping at school and you got a whipping at the neighbor's house, and the neighbor had called your mama's before you got home...and you got a whipping when you got there…...the true essence of a village!

Michelle's earliest memories included visions of becoming a teacher. When asked why she decided to become an educator, she explained,

> Well, when I was growing up, I always wanted to be a teacher. I was always the one who at the end of the year, I took home all the papers that my teacher wanted to give away. And I had school with everybody in the neighborhood that wanted to have school in summer. I was the teacher and my mom would get so mad because I would have papers galore everywhere and I always tutored. I would tutor anyone who needed tutoring. I wouldn't even charge. And I remember one year one of my friend's mom said, "I will pay you because he needs help."

Success. Professionally, Maya indicated that success for her had been historically based on the ability to do specific jobs, which were highly respected in the community, and doing those jobs well. "You sort of go with what you know." Therefore, surrounded by coal miners, preachers, and teachers, she chose to go into the field of education.

The overwhelming oral narrative that Toni recalled was that she grew up as "a well-rounded child." When asked about the narratives that were conveyed to her, she responded "I think my biggest narrative is being...from a young age, my dad told us 'You're special' and 'You're going to be somebody' and we just heard that from a young age throughout. And just those encouraging words just helped us to be well-rounded citizens."

Although Michelle wanted to become a teacher from an early age, that desire was largely ignored in high school after she took a professional interest survey. She described, "This survey is supposed to determine what you will actually be great at. And I had two indicators that were notated on my survey. One was an attorney and one was an educator." She further explained that out of those two choices, she chose to become an attorney rather than an educator because "all of my teachers said I was a great negotiator…and I was good at making my point. And so, I decided to go that route

and that's actually what I got my undergrad in…was pre-law with a minor in paralegal studies." In this instance, the support and guidance received from her village encouraged her to choose her career field. Later, however, she realized that her true joy came from working with students. At that time, she went back to school to become an educator.

Marginalization. Even as the participants reflected on narratives which indicated the need to "be twice as good" or "work twice as hard" to achieve success, they recalled precise instances when those words which had been spoken to them became unavoidably evident. When recalling her early days of integrated elementary schooling, Maya vividly recalled two experiences intended to acclimate her to the new school environment.

The first was the inclusion of a Black custodian as a primary disciplinarian of Black students in the newly integrated school she attended. Though Black certified educators were not plentiful during her days of elementary school, there were Black laborers within the school. Maya recalled that one gentleman was persistent in disciplining the Black students and held them to stricter adherence to the rules than the White students:

> We would have a custodian...a Black custodian who would correct us any time he felt like we were doing something out of place with the White kids. Even though the White kids were doing that, he would correct us, tell us not to do it, but everybody was doing it. And so, you know, that was the difference. Okay it's like why can't we do it? If, when we did things, it would stand out more…as we're being disruptive or we're being loud…even though that's what the majority were doing.

Importantly, Maya stated she felt as though the custodian was acting for the protection of the Black students. Still, she and the other Black students felt they were treated and expected to behave differently than the White students. Maya takeaway was

that she and her Black peers were required to assimilate immediately in this new learning space.

The second incident related to the disposition of certain teachers at her newly integrated elementary school. Maya described feeling that she was expected to further assimilate to the culture of the school where the White students' experiences were customarily accepted as the norm. Routinely, Black students were separated from each other in their classes and within their classrooms. Even so, Maya saw little difference in herself and others until and unless teachers pointed to those differences:

> I can remember not having, you know, making that distinction between Black and White, even when I was in fifth grade. And I just, sort of, to me, I fit in. I didn't get a difference until someone would bring that difference to my attention. But I can remember bonding with my classmates. But I also remember my White teachers seeing that bond, trying to break that up. I can very well distinguish that, between her wanting us to fit and not wanting us to fit.

Similarly, while Toni was in the sixth grade, an experience with a teacher allowed her to recognize that not all adults viewed her with the same affection imparted by her parents and her larger community village. She stated,

> I remember in 6th grade, the transition from 5th grade to 6th grade was really hard for me because pre-K through 5th grade is so nurturing. And one of my teachers, I raised my hand to ask a question, and she yelled out "The answer is in the book!" And, after then, it was like I retracted into a shell. I was afraid to answer any questions. That always stuck in my head.

Counter-Narratives of resiliency. Participants were aware of and extremely sensitive to the ways in which they had been marginalized in their elementary schooling. In response to the general and specific marginalization encountered as students, participants constructed counter-narratives of resiliency through words and actions designed to embrace their own students.

Participants experienced pushout from educators early in their educational careers. Then, they experienced negative work environments they felt were directly related to increasing social, political, and economic tensions in the larger community. Regardless, they found that the support from family and community coupled with self-efficacy led to successful outcomes for them and their students.

As an educator, Maya created an overarching counter-narrative as a response to the treatment she received in her early schooling days at the newly integrated school:

> To me, my most important role is to be approachable, and to be accessible. I want to be caring. I want to be positive in my interactions with children as well as staff and parents and administrators. I don't want to give off any kind of negative vibes. My main thing is to present myself as a positive, approachable person.

Maya wanted to ensure that those around her (students, peers, administrators, parents) did not feel separated from her as she did her fifth-grade teacher.

Toni experienced pushback from her sixth-grade teacher when she raised her hand to answer a question. Her teacher anticipated that rather than answering the question she was attempting to receive further guidance and reacted negatively to Toni. The resulting counter-narrative Toni constructed to address this behavior was explained by the participant. “So now even with my students--when I ask them a question--even if they don’t know the answer, I give them time to think and then, if they don’t know the answer, I might give them a clue.”

Michelle contextualized the experience of Black women in contemporary society:

> You know, as an African American woman in today's society you kind of look at everything that's happening in the world. And there's a different perspective because we have had to go through things that other people haven’t—well, maybe some people are having to go through now—but we've always had a different outlook.

Michelle indicated that this counter-narrative was directly related to her perspective as a Black female educator. This ability to look through disruptive narratives to seek better outcomes for herself and her students served as instrumental during a time of high student and employment turnover at her work site:

> Everybody complained and everybody was so mad. And they were fussing about—to me it was the wrong thing. Because as educators, we are supposed to get into this business for the children. And it seemed like, in the process, a lot of people were forgetting that we are here not for us, not for our glory, but for these children.

Even as the discord from dissatisfied co-workers in the work community continued, Michelle explained her carefully constructed response. She recalls that she "looked at all of the complaining and I thought to myself, 'Man, am I looking at this the wrong way or do I just know that it could be so much worse?'" Her revelation was that it "could be so much worse...and I'm gonna look at it in a positive light...because what we are griping and complaining about is not important." She further explained,

> When you haven't had everything just handed to you and everything has just been so good and so smooth and so, you have a different way of looking at things. And you're like 'Yeah…I'm not going to be mad about that.' Because there is nothing I can do to change it. There's nothing that…by me being mad is not going to stop it from happening. So, I can either deal with it and move on, be happy it's happening, or continue to let it fester and make me into a person that I don't necessarily need to be, especially for the children that I'm supposed to be working with.

Summary. The initial data from the research was in response to the first sub-question "How do the descriptions of personal narratives from three elementary educators contribute to their personal identities?" In the participants' collective descriptions of personal narratives which contributed to their personal identities, three themes were evidenced. Those themes were the community as a village, success, and marginalization.

To address marginalization experienced as students, the theme of counter-narratives through resiliency surfaced through participants' words as well as through their actions.

Data collected in response to the second research sub-question "How do participants describe the ways in which personal identities affect their perceptions of academic success for their students?" revealed that participants were constantly confronted with others' perceptions, which helped them mold their personal identities.

Perceptions

While many of those perceptions encountered by participants were based on long-standing stereotypes about Black females, others established males as superior to females and then further subjugated Black females to White females. Because there were not many Black females employed as certified educators at the sites where the participants worked, the participants felt compelled to address others' perceptions which affected them as well as their students. Necessarily, participants addressed themes of stereotypes, race, gender inequality, monolithic experiences, and intersectionality issues which they recognized as disruptive to the academic success of their diverse students.

Stereotypes. Using their acquired knowledge concerning stereotypes, participants acted to address notions of inferiority with their students. Recalling a plethora of events which occurred throughout their lives, participants incorporated debunking those issues into their pedagogy. Michelle explained that stereotypes depicting anger, laziness, and incapability were directed at traditionally marginalized populations, especially Black females. She stated, "You're the target. You know, sometimes they look at us because

sometimes we talk loud, we are angry." Michelle indicated that this was but one instance of misrepresentation as "loud" was equated with "anger" for Blacks while it was equated with excitement for other groups in similar situations. Such stereotypes easily lended themselves as teachable moments for students of color: "And so I try to take those experiences and try to get them to understand that we are looked at differently because of our color." Michelle indicated those teachable moments were meant to identify and address stereotypes so that all students recognized them and the harm they caused.

Participants reflected that they dealt with systemic stereotyping, which questioned them, their performance, and their ability levels. Addressing stereotypes of laziness closely related to the Black female, Michelle explained,

> The stereotypes that I have encountered as an educator is that I feel like as a Black female educator, I have had to prove myself more. I have had to work [twice] as hard...I've had to fight [twice] as hard for the position that I am in even when something happens or something occurs and I'm asked a question and I give them an answer—and it's a valid answer—it seems as if they still have to get that answer from someone else before it's believed.

Maya indicated that she believed several staff whom she worked with and for felt she was "incapable" of facilitating the counseling program effectively. In addition to what she felt was a constant utterance of suggestions as to what "she should do with her program" there were also suggestions that she was ineffectively implementing that program as indicated by end of the year teacher surveys and personal conversations. Thus, she felt she was routinely rendered voiceless. "Oh, my goodness! No voice."

Maya indicated that several tasks which were under the direction of other counselors both within this school district as well as in other surrounding school districts were differently delegated to other staff members in her building. Attitudes and then actions toward her consisted of behaviors which were not expressly directed at others.

She described ways in which co-workers addressed her. She said they called her only "when they need you." Even then they did not use "my name when you're talking to me or trying to get my attention." She explained these actions led her to feeling dejected: "No value. Just, I feel devalued. Left out."

The origins of the perceptions were unclear to Maya but thought to be induced by power or simply the perception that a Black woman could not possibly be capable. "My skin color that maybe when you look at me you think I don't know or maybe you feel like I shouldn't know just by my appearance or just by the color of my skin." Regardless of the basis, the actions indicated to her that they felt "like I have nothing to contribute."

Accordingly, Toni explained, "My identity as an educator is...is great in a way, but sometimes is sad in a way because some people do not value my opinion." Further, Toni asserted the following regarding Black female educators:

> I think the biggest stereotype is that as an educator, we don't know how to educate students or even that our opinions are not valued. Being a Black educator, I believe that we are strong educators and I think we're strong not just in academics…. Sometimes I think people think Black people in general or Black educators are ignorant and we don't know. And we are not ignorant.

Michelle's experience indicated that most of those who appeared to doubt her ability did so because she was a Black female educator:

> I've had one teacher to question some things that I have done but I have also heard that same teacher question some things that another teacher—another special education teacher—has done that she worked with that was also Black and also female. But there is another teacher who works in our building who is not African American. She never questions her if she has a question about a child or a student.

In a separate but related situation, a Black female educator's credibility was questioned because she had obtained an on-line degree. Although many colleagues within the

building and throughout the district had obtained similar degrees, their credibility was never openly questioned. Michelle reflected:

> This one teacher made a statement that because this other special education teacher received her degree online it was somehow not a true degree. Just because it was online, she did not acquire the knowledge or the skills that she needed to teach in the role or the field that she was teaching in.

The assertions appeared to this participant to be a tactic to first introduce and then further a narrative that the Black female was not qualified. According to Michelle, those same concerns were not associated with other educators who received their degree in an alternative path even though "really, if you think about it, most of the educators that we work with—if they do have a degree higher than an undergrad, they got it online."

Michelle further explained how such generalizations surpass simply affecting Black female educators and extend to perceptions and actions which directly impact students:

> For instance, if we have a group of young, Black males in the hallway, they automatically assume that they are up to no good. And because they are maybe talking in a group, they may be gotten onto a little bit more than another diverse group at the opposite end of the hallway.

Michelle explained that the perception that even the simple act of communicating together would lead to disruption was problematic; moreover, the ways such perceptions manifested and eventually spread to other staff and students was even more troublesome as it led to "policing" of specific students at school, including their physical placement in classes. To counter those perceptions, she explained that outside resources were welcome in the building to support these students and positively influence the ways in which they were perceived. The outside resources included "pastors, and youth ministers" and

"anybody we can that's willing to lend a hand and help these kids become the successful citizens that we need them to be."

Participants acknowledged that they were often incapable of successfully addressing each notion of inferiority without feeding into the previously mentioned stereotype of anger. Michelle sentiments summarized the overall disposition of the participants: "With the things that I had to deal with as a Black woman, knowing that I sometimes haven't been accepted because of the way I look or sometimes not been included, because of the way I look, I have learned to look at the outlook--the positive outlook of things and just let it be."

Race. Maya began her schooling in segregated schools. There, she was surrounded by students who were racially similar. She explained how she had to traditionally assimilate to the environment of the majority population to attain success after integration:

> Because of my race, I have basically been educated in a, I won't say a diverse setting, I've been educated in an either Black or White setting, predominantly White. So, I've had to adapt and adjust to growing up in that type of environment. Now, I feel like the opposite did not happen with the White children because they were the majority. And they really didn't, I didn't see any adapting or adjusting to me. It's like I had to do most of the adjusting.

Toni added that she had experienced "a lot of challenges because of my race." Among the challenges were her assertations that some people judged her prior to even knowing her. "Just people not liking me because of the color of my skin. You know, even before they got to know me." Toni explained this dismissive attitude led to others "not valuing my opinion."

Accordingly, Michelle added, “you have to keep that in the back of your mind but then again not let it weigh you down but take it for what it is.” She furthered “it’s still like a fight unfortunately. And sometimes there's nothing you can do that will change another person’s perspective because even when you’ve shown them that ‘Hey, I’ve got this!’ it can still be difficult.”

Gender issues. While teaching has traditionally been a profession dominated by women, issues of gender equity concerned participants. Maya indicated that women were expected to accomplish more than men especially at the elementary school level. “It’s expected... a lot more is asked.” When asked if that was on the building or district level, she signaled that “I see that on the building level AND district-wide.” Participants pointed to instances of activities at the elementary level such as creating visually stimulating environments and overseeing clubs were expected and largely unfunded while activities such as sports at the higher levels provided participants with stipends. Additionally, when considering other roles and responsibilities within the operations of the district, Maya said “I think a lot more to expect it out of...out of females.” Toni agreed, stating “I would say...just thinking that ladies are less than” simultaneously led to men occupying many of the leadership roles in which they continued to make decisions for their predominantly female staffs.

Intersectionality. Educators found that although the extent to which issues of inclusion and exclusion were based on race or gender, they acknowledged that they were not treated equitably with their male or with their White counterparts. Even on issues

with which they had a lifetime of lived experience, they felt they were treated as novice and subjugated to the same professional development as those who have extremely limited capacity to lead. Toni indicated that the general disposition she noticed from others was "that we are not important. And again, back to what I said before...opinions not valued as a female or as a Black woman. That's been one of my biggest challenges since I have been teaching."

Considering race and gender, Michelle acknowledged intersectionality:

> And it's even worse, when you're Black and female. But I have learned that you have to work extra hard. You have to...UPFRONT. You have to show what you know and you have to continuously prove yourself in this workforce, and not just to men but to your White counterparts as well…so not only do you have race...but you have woman on top of that. So, its two strikes, you're almost out."

Monolithic experiences. A common occurrence among the participants was dealing with the misconception that all Black people, regardless of social, economic, and professional practices, have one solitary experience. Michelle indicated "I feel like working in the school system that we work in, that the teachers--because there is not enough diversity amongst our educators--I feel like they look at the students who do not come from the backgrounds that they come from, they have ways that they look at them based on generalizations" which did not assume the best of diverse students.

Maya recalled that when inspirational speakers addressed the faculty and staff, her peers did not receive messages as she thought they were intended. Whereas she saw the nuances of the narratives spun by the speakers, "others perceived that alright here's another Black woman who was a child in a poverty-stricken, uneducated and that's another one of those...that was another one of those stories." Accordingly, she perceived

that her take away to make a difference in multiple children's lives was not similarly received by others. She reflected,

> I don't think it was perceived like I need to make a difference in a child's life. I don't see that message getting to them, that you can make a difference in a child's life. I think it was like you look at that child and it's like, okay, that child is unfortunate. There's no telling what's going on at home and you just let it go. That's just it. And, I feel like I was probably looked at like "Okay, is that your life? Was that your life, too? What did you go through?" Like all African American employees had that same encounter, like this is always where we came from.

Just as other races have members who have unique identities constructed largely by individual experiences, participants' descriptions of their identities varied significantly. Toni described herself as an individual who was "very happy. Umm...I'm spiritual. I believe in God. I serve as a mom, a wife, counselor, doctor, lawyer. Several roles as an individual and as an educator." Michelle acknowledged her identity as an educator stating "I'm a co-worker. I'm a collaborator. I'm a thinker." Unfortunately, they felt that many of their peers saw them simply as monolithic beings with the same uniform experience.

Invisibility. Participants reflected on how perceptions of others left them feeling as though they were not heard or seen. Each also pointed out that their administrators rarely included people of color in key leadership positions. Those who were included were typically male. Thus, participants felt as though they were often "unseen."

After years of reduced participation in generating ideas and actions to strengthen her counseling program, Maya reflected that she felt "invisible" in her current role. Maya added that although she has attempted to be available and visible, she has not been effective in that regard:

> Not visible at all. And that was one of my objectives when I said I wanted to be a school counselor. I said I wanted to be visible. I wanted to be visible, I wanted to be approachable, but I am visible to the students on this hall that I see...and then the ones that come to me but other than that...they don't ever see me.

That invisibility was further highlighted when she tried to enlighten others in the workplace about her culture: "truly, honestly, I don't even look or expect any kind of result or response."

Toni reflected that she had been asked to help choose textbooks at her school but had been included in little else related to decision making. Similarly, Michelle reflected that when others questioned her on basic educational matters, they would still seek clarification from others. Michelle said, "it seems as if they still have to get that answer from someone else before it's believed."

Actions

Not accepting of the negative perceptions often encountered in the workspace, participants indicated a variety of methods to address the perceptions they encountered. Maya and Michelle each explained that after years of skirting around offensive actions they now addressed the issues directly. Maya said that after decades of deflecting and ignoring what others did and said to her as well as around her, she has changed significantly. "Well, I speak up when I need to. I don't have a problem now, saying things that make people feel uncomfortable." Maya indicated,

> I'm not really concerned about how they perceive what I say. I used to think about how to say it--in a way that's not offensive but the message is going through. But now, I feel like the true me is to respond in that moment.

According to Maya, the result of this action has been to categorize her actions stereotypically. She explained that the response to her voicing her opinion is "not an

avoidance but it is, they seem to be confused, you know. I'm the angry Black woman or I'm trying to start something." She stated that she was "not trying to start something. I'm just giving you my opinion." She explained that she simply no longer cared to carry that burden.

Similarly, Michelle felt that she "can address anything in a professional way. She further explained that her "actions speak louder than my words. I feel like as long as I am doing what I'm supposed to be doing for my kids and they are showing improvements--they are being corrected...then that's proof enough. I don't have to explain anything further."

Addressing situations extended from simply addressing those things which affected Michelle to addressing those things which affected her peers and students. When a colleague attempted to belittle a mutual peer, Michelle responded in a manner intended that allowed the colleague to analyze her thinking. "But I did address the other thing when the snide comment was made about someone's education by 'Oh, I'm sorry. I got mine online, too.' It's just that mine came from the University of Alabama in Birmingham, but it was still online."

Summary. The data collected in response to the second sub-question in this research "How do participants describe the ways in which personal identities affect their perceptions of academic success for their students?" revealed that participants desired to address stereotypes, issues of race, gender, intersectionality, beliefs of monolithic experiences, and invisibility related to Black female educators through actions which questioned rather than perpetuated such notions. Although each participant acknowledged

the counter-productiveness of such notions, they had all avoided confronting the notions directly early in their careers. However, over time each participant cultivated actions which contradicted the validity of those notions.

Data collected and analyzed for the final sub-question "How does each participant's perception of academic success affect their pedagogy?" revealed a culture within the educational community of overwhelming tone deafness to the necessary practices that facilitate excellence in education for diverse students. This tone deafness by others in the educational community led each participant to take individual action to better ensure academic success for students. For them, this meant teaching to the whole child rather than just teaching standards or curriculum in order. Ultimately, participants understood that culturally responsible pedagogical practices ensured that diverse students were more successful.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) was used to bridge a student's home life with that of the school. In a sense, participants used CRP to ensure that their students did not experience the "invisibility" they experienced in those same sites. Within the theme of CRP, subthemes indicated by participants in this study included differentiation, lived experience of students and educators, relationships, representation, responsibility, and an ethic of care.

Differentiation. Each of the participants described successful pedagogy as that which included teaching to their individual students' strengths. Maya explained that she

considered the curriculum being taught but also considered the presentation. She said "it could be the same material, but I look for it, look at how it's presented in a different way. It might be the same story, but how are you doing the story?" She added:

> You know I do the learning styles for all of my students. And I tell them this is something you can use the rest of your life. But then I notice, there might be a language barrier with my, with some kids. And I have no problem reading each question, explaining it to them, going over it. I take my time when they ask questions. I don't give them just a general answer, dismiss them, and expect them to do it. I will say "Bring your things up here. Oh, let's look at this." You know I just sort of take my time.... I want to make sure they understand what's going on.

Similarly, Toni defined successful pedagogy for her students "as teaching to what they understand or teaching to their level." She achieved this by getting to know them before attempting to teaching them even the basic primary skills:

> So, when they come in, I'm going to do a little interview with them to see where they are. Like what kind of things they like but I also pull out my language cards to see what they know, like if they know what a stove is, if they know what a refrigerator is, just different things around the house or around the classroom to see if they know what they are.

Several additional strategies were described by Toni to ensure student success. "The first one I would say would be repeating my directions. And then asking them 'Do you understand what I am saying?'" Even when her students said they understood what they are to do, she employed another strategy. She explained that she had "them say it back to me ...because a lot of times kids will say 'Yes, I understand' but once they get ready to do their work or the activity you've given them to do, they don't understand.'" Even further, Toni explained "they have to have that time to grasp that skill or grasp what you're talking about. And just because it's a chapter there, that doesn't mean you're just going through those chapter or those lessons." She acknowledged that "You've got to stop right there where they are, make sure they are getting it and grasping it before you

move on." Determining her students' prior knowledge helped her reach them at the developmentally appropriate level. "So, for instance, I might not be on the lesson the next teacher's on just because my students, they haven't been exposed to some of the things that I've been teaching." Rather than assuming they lacked the ability to complete an assignment or perform a skill she indicated that her actions gave them the necessary time to learn and grow.

Toni felt that those who were not educating contemporary youth did not understand the issues and concerns that current teachers had, expounding that this differentiation of skills was "...really, really hard to explain, especially to people who haven't been in the classroom before" and to those who had not been in the classroom for a while.

Noting that progress monitoring was an on-going practice, Toni described a strategic routine in which she checked their progress. "Now with their work, I'm checking their work daily. But also, when they come up, like if they did something correctly, we talk about it." When students have reached a desired level of academic success, she acknowledged that success. "I might give them a high five or I might give them a sticker, or I might say "Ohhh, that work was awesome today!" It might be something verbal that I say to them." She explained that this differentiation was not unique to a few students but ingrained into her practice.

Echoing those sentiments Michelle stated "I would define successful pedagogy for diverse students as kind of how I would just look at diversity in and of itself. I take my students, their characteristics, the things that make them unique, and I try to blend that into my teaching methods." Michelle recognized that many of her students were

students were Black, English Language Learners (ELL), fell on the low socioeconomic status group, or had behavior issues. Thus, she posited herself as a resource for her students by building "bridges between where kids who are struggling, where they are and where they need to be on their grade level. And so, I'm a resource." She explained that "I help kids who are struggling in math and in reading and I help them gain in their deficit area to get where they need to be." She also detailed the ways in which she accomplished this:

> If I'm dealing with an ELL student, then I try to use as many pictures and incorporate those into as much of the content as I can. With some of our students who are from lower socio-economic statuses that may have not been outside of the city walls…I try to pull things off the internet that I can give them as much visualization as possible. So, I try to use more of a hands-on approach in that way because it seems to me when you do that, the kids are more apt to understand it a little bit better. Most of my strategies stem around making it relatable.

Lived experience of students. To ensure that each student was represented and included in quality instruction, participants reported that they were intentional in using cues from the backgrounds and cultures of their students. Maya indicated "I look for things, it might be a book that's read and written by an African American. It may be a play or something that's demonstrated by Hispanics. It may be White. I just want them exposed to all diversities. Some of it may be rhythmic or it may be straightforward reading, I just want them exposed to all of those."

When explaining pedagogical practices for diverse students, Toni explained "As African-American students or Hispanic students, they don't always know what you're talking about." She noted that in her experience this was not a deficit although it was commonly referred as such; it was that they hadn't been exposed. "A good example of that is you might be talking about the beach and the sand. Well, some of them haven't

been to the beach. Some of them haven't put their feet in sand. So, you know, you bring the sand in, you know let them feel it. You know, put their feet in it." Toni related that she routinely facilitated this to administrators, teachers, and parents on behalf of students "You have to explain that to them. You also have to explain that they have to have that time. They haven't had that background knowledge."

Understanding that the issues which concern students outside of the classroom has a direct impact within the learning community, Toni stated that "I think because of my gender, I bring a compassionate role toward the male students because as we all know our boys and young men, they really need encouragement and compassion. And also, they need to feel important." Further, Toni stated, "I believe all opinions don't come from a textbook. It's some opinions that come from experience. You know, working with children and, also, communicating with others. I think as Black people, we communicate well with each other. We can distinguish instantly and silently that "this worked well, or this did not work well." Much of that has been acknowledged in gestures rather than words.

Toni added, "But also, as a classroom teacher, one of my strengths is communicating well with my parents. So, like this first week of school, I have communicated well, you know." When co-workers did not understand the rationale behind being so transparent with families, she stated that "some people, they didn't understand that. They were like "Why are you going ahead and telling them now?"

Michelle indicated that she attempted to incorporate multisensory learning activities as much as possible: "I try to use what they...based on what I believe or what I

know that they bring in—their background knowledge of the things that they bring in and I try to implement that into my learning style and just build off of that."

Lived experience of educators. Participants indicated that their past experiences helped them move all their students toward success. Maya reflected on her years of being in segregated and integrated spaces:

> Those qualities have helped me in the class by being able to adapt. Because I have [been] in diverse settings, I can address my kids equally. It doesn't matter, race, color, creed because I have been in such different, multiple environments that it...it doesn't impact how I treat kids or how I present myself or how I respond to them or how I teach them.

When Michelle reflected on her educational and career paths, she related those prior experiences to helping students recognize they could change their own path when they deemed them unfruitful.

> And I still did, you know, went through trials and tribulations that I had to learn on my own that that's not really the pathway that I needed to be on…but all of that contributed...ah...to making me who I am ...into the person that I think I've formed into today.

Relationships. Participants suggested that building bridges from the community to the school through relationships was beneficial for all students. Michelle asserted that students "have different viewpoints." As a responsive educator, she suggested "we have to look at all of those and understand that that's what makes them who they are and that may be why they are acting the way that they act." Additionally, she stated "that goes back to building those relationships with those kids because you can't...you can't beat them down for that because that's who they are and that's how they were built." She asserted that some of her students had been trampled by life experiences. Thus, she stated, "You have to raise them up" prior to teaching them "because sometimes, it's not

about 15 x 20...it's about 'Can I give you a hug today because you look sad?' And that's what we need to do."

Michelle spoke additionally about a professional development training she had recently attended. She related that the most important part of the training was proactively building students up. "But before you got to that part, we want to want to try to build relationships with those students, so you won't get to that." Toni added that her primary objective in communicating well with caregivers and students was to build relationships. "I'm being honest with them and I'm building that relationship with them and we are going to continue that relationship throughout the year, just like you would with a family. But this is my school family."

Representation. Each of the participants spoke to the importance of and the need for diverse representation within the school context. Each of the participants in this study had a Black female educator early in their educational career and noted the importance of inviting other Black females into the field of education. Maya suggested ideas for future educators, saying, "Well, first be true to yourself. I think that if you are genuine, and if you like what you're doing, do what you do genuinely. No pretenses. I know the students will accept the real you and they can identify the false you. They know what real and they know what's false and you'll be able to see that so just be you.

Toni stated, "They started saying that we needed one Black teacher to teach in schools. So, I think they were just going to put us in the schools just to say they had that one African American teacher, not realizing that by putting us in the schools it was going

to uplift our children, children of diversity, even just seeing us. But even, I think, by how we were raised, we project that to our students."

Maya routinely told students to "learn about people who differ from you. They can teach you some things and you can teach them something so just be open and just experience, you know, other... other cultures and ethnicities. Be curious." Maya insisted that diverse students not "give up who you are, you know, just to try to fit in. Do what you're told but don't give up your, your beliefs for...to just be like someone else."

Similarly, Michelle echoed,

> Continue to be you. Don't try to change for anyone. Because really, the people who are not willing to understand you as a person and what you struggle with and what you go through, after a while, they're really not going to matter. I would want them to know that even though they have those struggles and they may have challenges that they may have to face, and no one else will have to.

Toni's advice to diverse students was promising. "To diverse students, I would encourage them to, the same thing, not to be upset with yourself because you don't know how to do a skill, not to be down on yourself."

Responsibility. Each of the participants coupled their career with a responsibility they had to the communities from which they came and to the students they served. That responsibility included encouraging them to be their authentic selves. That responsibility added another layer onto the duties they undertook daily. The blurred lines which separated their personal and professional lives were identified by each participant.

Toni described the various duties she undertook regularly. "Wow…. a lot of duties. First of all, I would say... meeting the needs of all of my students... and meeting them where they come from...like they come from various backgrounds...so you have to

meet the needs at where they come from." This included building collaborative relationships with parents and other stakeholders.

Even in her personal time, Toni found herself taking on the responsibility of teaching to parents, guardians, and other stakeholders in her students' education. "Some people ask me like 'How do you do it in your classroom?' or 'How do you teach this certain skill?' that I'm teaching." She took on this additional role of facilitating instruction to caretakers because she understood that "everybody is not taught, and they don't know. And that doesn't mean that there is something wrong with them because they don't know...but I would tell them." She added that she often offered strategies for family members to use at home to strengthen their students' hands when they were learning to write their name. She taught them that one strategy which utilized material they were likely to already have at home was to "write the name with a yellow marker...and have them trace. And they just continue to trace and trace and, eventually, they write it on their own." Another strategic pre-writing task for parents to introduce or continue at home was to have students squeeze Playdoh to strengthen their student's fine motor skills. Rather than just writing students off due to their lack of skill acquisition, she advocated that her students had "to strengthen those motor skills so they can be able to grip that pencil and to be able to write and color."

Michelle also considered collaboration an essential responsibility in her pedagogy. Within the building, she reflected,

> I think I have to collaborate with everyone in this building. Even the ones who I don't work with to some extent...because... I have had those students before, and I know some things about those students that are pertinent for them to know for them to be able to really delve down to the individual who is sitting in front of them. So, I think, as a collaborator, you have to--when you are working in a

> building and when you are working with students--that you have to know that it's not just you.

Outside of the building site, she collaborated with family members and other valuable stakeholders:

> We work with a lot of kids who have behavior issues and we utilize a lot of outside sources. They can offer different programs to try to help these children, who suffer with certain types of behaviors. We want to do whatever it is or whatever it takes for them.

Participants also described a responsibility to represent their race in a manner that would encourage their students to be their authentic selves, an issue they have had within those same settings as students and then as educators. An example of this was demonstrated by the focus on Michelle's hair. She recalled how those in her current workplace responded to her various hair styles which were selected by her stylist on a regular basis:

> Now administrators...one administrator was like "Girl, I love that!" She would always comment like "I love that, I love that!" But you see the looks and you see the (sighs) when someone else says "I love the hair! I love it like that!" I have had different hairstyles but sometimes he will come back to one. I actually had to take a stance with my hair. Like that is going to affect my ability to teach and it doesn't…my hair shouldn't have any bearings or shouldn't affect your day whatsoever. And so, I've had to have a conversation like that.

Maya explained how typical interactions with her co-workers were constructed around issues and concerns which were primarily focused on her coworkers' culture at the expense of her own.

> Just in general conversation I might put in something about my culture. Usually, it might be at lunch or something like that, or when we're just talking at planning time, I might say something. But I don't even try to inject my culture into this, in the professional realm of this school, this faculty and staff, because I just don't think they want to know. I don't think they're concerned with it.

On the other hand, Maya felt as though her co-workers freely and openly referenced their culture in those same settings:

> I think they are constantly bringing up their culture in these settings. And they're uncomfortable when you bring up yours. And then freely, when they freely bring up their culture and cultural settings and beliefs and things, they sort of look at you like you're supposed to be in agreement. You're either supposed to agree, understand what they're saying, or be in awe.

Michelle echoed sentiments like Maya when explaining what is was like to inject Black culture into common conversation. "You know, it's hard getting someone to understand how it feels to be Black. If you don't know, if you have not experienced it, you...you can maybe be empathetic, but you don't understand it to its full extent." Michelle went further to explain how her intersectionality included her culture in all aspects. "And I look at it because I am the mother of a brown boy. I am a wife to a brown man. I am a mother to a brown girl. I am a brown girl myself. And the experience that we have is so much different than any other culture."

Michelle explained that there were occasions that those from the majority culture at her site were receptive to her culture. Those opportunities allowed her to help those educators better understand the whole student rather than just the physical body that goes to the school during the weekday.

> But what I try to get those who have an ear for listening--because there is a difference to explaining to those who just don't care, or those who are just not going to try to care or try to understand--but the conversations that I do have with the ones who do have an ear to listen is that when these babies go outside of these four walls, you know, we can teach them all about respect, all about being kind, about not showing an eye for an eye, about not being or trying to be the adult in the classroom. But when they leave this place, those are their experiences.

Likewise, Toni did not feel as though her co-workers had been receptive to her culture. "I don't think I have been able to explain my culture, my background, my beliefs.

Maybe with some of my friends in the building, which is like 3 or 4 people, but other than that, no."

Participants thought that as though their representation of their culture just by their presence changes the dynamic for students and staff alike. Each of the participants indicated that they are willing and available to explain differences in traditions, expectations, and beliefs that exist between races and socioeconomic groups that teachers lacking exposure to these issues lack. Additionally, addressing the importance of representation for Black students, Michelle said,

> We have been through some of the same challenges that they've been through. And we may be able to guide them in the direction that they are trying to go, because a lot of times because of our environments and because of our backgrounds, we are looked at differently and we are not understood. And our kids are not understood in this system at all. But, as a Black educator, we can show them that even though this is where we came from or this is what we have to face, we are overcomers.

Even as each of the participants prepares to conclude their careers at these sites soon, they indicate they have largely remained in their positions because they represent something important to their students at the sites in which they work. Michelle reflected "I have wanted to leave where I am for a very long time because the atmosphere is so toxic.... BUT I am a voice for those babies, and I feel like if I leave, they won't have one anymore. They won't have one that they can look at and see 'Oh, she's like me.'" When asked how long she has shouldered that responsibility she replied, "That has kept me there the entire time." According to Michelle there are a total of four Blacks out of approximately 73 total staff members working at her site. Thus, the weight and responsibility of raising those Black students is heavy and includes utilizing the Black male custodian as a resource "when issues arise with some of our Black male students."

Although recognizing that he is a "great person" she acknowledges that there "we need more" employees who reflect the student demographic groups.

As these participants prepare to leave their positions, they are still optimistic for other Black female educators to take their place. Toni stated, "It's so important. Black educators are so, so important. And again, I don't want them to be down or feel less than. We are more than enough." Toni suggested that other Black female educators should "be encouraged." She extended that sentiment by adding they should

> feel good that you're an educator because we need Black educators every day. I think our children need to see Black educators in various roles in the school system. And I also would encourage them to not feel that they are less than…. I feel that we are important, and we are here to lay that basic foundation, not just for the academics but for, just for…like for music, and the arts, the stem. Because you have to meet all of those various needs for a child to be well-rounded, not just in one area. So again, I would just say be encouraged that you are important, and just don't let anybody put you down because you're going into the education field because the education field is important.

Michelle's responses paralleled those of Toni. She said, "I'd tell them to walk in your truth. Be who you are. Don't let anyone stop you from going after your goals or your dreams or what you feel like you want to accomplish." Going further, Michelle said that future Black educators should "be that person for your younger counterparts, to let them know that they do have someone who have someone who has their back. They do have someone who is in their corner and that they can come to when they feel like no one else understands them…. We have been where they are."

Ethic of Care. Each of the participants expressed a desire to leave their careers. In the face of this desire, each also expressed a reluctance to do so. They felt that in their

capacity they could assist in the academic and social success of students through an ethic of care.

Maya, as a counselor, felt as though other educators promoted a culture of simply dealing with surface level issues:

> Well, it—from my point of view, from the way I look at students—I can still try to be that person that's going to encourage them and to help them. But from other's point of view, I don't know. I get the sense that it might be that that's just more than they want to be bothered with. I do. I just, I get "I want to deal with this, but I don't want to deal with that, that underlying issue.

Not surprisingly, Maya felt that students fell through gaps when they did not have those underlying issues addressed:

> Like, I just found out this year--and this kid is in the second year at this School—and I didn't know that this kid had a particular exceptionality. And I said, "Okay, we've got to do this, this, this, this, this and this for this kid." It's never been brought up again, so I know that it's up to me to do this, this, this, this, this for this kid because you're not taking care of this. No one else is concerned about it. The teacher, White teacher, White administrator, the front office who were just counting these as absences, missed work, you know? And that's just not how it is. That's not how it should be handled.

When that specific student with exceptionalities did not have his medical and emotional needs met, he was treated from a deficit model academically by educators and administrators "...because you're not viewing it as what it actually is and maybe dismissing it?" Maya's concern then became "Is the child going to fail when you know this is going on?"

Maya regularly positioned herself as a resource to be used at the onset of students' behavioral issues. "I feel like the student should be able to see the counselor before they go to the principal." She stated,

> I think if there is going to be, if there is a problem in the room, and you get to the point where you've had enough--that's enough--it shouldn't get to "I've had enough, you're going to the principal." It should be to the point where you're like

> ‘Okay, I need for this child to see the principal so we can head this off’ before they become an incident or a discipline report.

Even as Maya voiced her opinion regularly on such matters, she was traditionally brought in only far after the students’ needs had been ignored, the student had been referred to the office, and either the principal or referring teacher alerted her. She said, “It’s sort of that I am brought in on the tail end to fix it.” Her role, then, became complicated. Whereas she positioned herself as a student advocate, now “…I have, only through you do I have any idea of what’s going on, you know? …Most times, I don’t even know what’s going on with the kids until it becomes a disruption.”

Toni spoke of the need for specific care for her diverse students. “And then another role is loving them and nurturing them, that comes first. And then, in meeting the needs I would say that you have some kids who haven’t had the proper rest or food to eat. You have to meet that need first, before you go into the academics. And I think a lot of people don’t understand that.” Specifically, she pointed out how she was responsive to students with behavioral issues: “I know how to work with kids who come in with behavioral issues. It doesn’t necessarily mean that they are bad. You have to get to know that child, to see why they’re acting out. Usually, it’s a reason.”

Proactively, Toni attempted to control the narrative of problematic behavior in students. “We have a monthly motto that I encourage my parents to have their children say in the mirror in the morning and at night before they go to bed...because so many children hear so many negative words...you know like ‘You can’t do it’ or ‘You’re stupid’ and they believe that. You know, they come to school and you must break those strongholds.” Toni attributed her nurturing to her culturally identity:

> I think, because of my race, I believe the nurturing, the loving, caring, and being very compassionate...not just when they come in to say, you know, just get a pencil and write or get a book and read. You really have to get to know them, their likes and dislikes. Or either ask them about their feelings like 'How are you feeling today?' They might have had a bad morning. That could set the tone, so you know you have got to talk to them and get them to share. You know talk to them about it and they can ease on through the day with comfort.

Toni further spoke about her role in advocating for dual language learners. When confronted with suggestions based on experience from other educators that younger students would be "passed on" and would simply "catch up" by the time they reached third grade, she responded, "I kept raising my hand saying that if that basic foundation is not being laid in kindergarten, they cannot go on." Toni countered, "With my experience, if you give those ELL students another year, they are leaders but those skills that we teach in kindergarten, they have them down and they are ready to go on to first grade." She further explained to school leaders, "I'm not saying that there is something wrong with them, it's not. They just need another year to hear the English language and we work with them with those language cards."

Michelle's care for her students extended to include those issues of fear and survival that students encountered outside of school:

> These four walls do not negate that. So when they leave us, they experience the fact that one of my students is afraid to stay at home at night because there are people of "lesser than status" walking past his trailer…and he's terrified because he has had to be the adult in his house because Mama is God knows where and he might not even know who daddy is. Or you have the experience where you are a great kid, but you're scared when you see police lights. You know, and so you know we do have those conversations. And I do have those conversations with people that I feel like are my allies, in hopes that you will understand that these kids have so much. They have a different upbringing. They have different things that, they have different experiences.

Summary

The data collected for the final sub question indicated that participants encountered a culture of tone deafness to students needs at their sites. As a response to this culture, participants employed culturally responsive practices to more effectively include their diverse students. These practices allowed students to address biases in perceptions so that learning communities were more inclusive for all students. Participants created communities of learning which mimicked the villages which had molded each of them.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was designed to explore how Black female educators teaching in exurban elementary schools characterize their personal narratives. Guided by a social justice framework, this study attempts to show how Black women's identities have been co-created, how their perceptions of success have been formulated, and how perceptions of academic success have helped them frame their pedagogy for diverse students.

A qualitative research approach was employed to conduct this study. Personal narratives of three Black female educators were used to address the questions central to this research. The central question in this research study is the following: "How do three Black female educators characterize their personal narratives as they facilitate the needs of diverse students? Sub-questions within this research included:

1. How do the descriptions of personal narratives from three elementary educators contribute to their personal identities?
2. How do participants describe the ways in which personal identities affect their perceptions of academic success for their students?
3. How does each participant's perception of academic success affect their pedagogy?

Major Findings

A unique direction in research was explored through the perspective of three Black female educators teaching in exurban areas in central Alabama. Through systematic data analysis, research questions were addressed, and four themes were acknowledged. Additionally, within certain themes, subthemes were recognized as occurring. In Chapter 4, direct quotes coupled with rich, thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) were used to describe participants' beliefs and experiences. In this chapter, the research questions have been answered through a discussion of the major findings within each theme.

Oral Narratives

Both oral and written narratives are longstanding staples in the Black community (Ani, 1994; Harris-Perry, 2011). These educational narratives which describe ways of being for Blacks, have traditionally been passed down generationally by friends, families, and community members in churches and in the metaphoric villages in which participants live (Darnell, 2017). Embracing such narratives has allowed participants in this study to acknowledge and work past encountered master narratives which continue to pervade the contemporary educational system. Master narratives are those which are substantially grounded in racist ideology, pervasive, and told in ways which generate power for specific persons or groups (Goessling, 2018). Such narratives employ the use of images and language which further generate power for these specific groups while devaluing others (Jordan-Zachery, 2009). These stories negatively affect members of racialized groups when they are internalized (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The first oral narrative contributed to defining participants' personal identity was that of a spiritual being. Maya responded that "preachers" were the first group of people revered within her community. She further identified as a person who was a proud member of her church. In addition to praying for her students, Toni stated "I'm spiritual. I believe in God." She described that she "served" as a wife and mother and was "called" to teach. Michelle indicated that she was "thankful" for a "praying family" and noted that her transition from another career into education was "paved by God."

The interconnectedness expressed between participants and their spiritual relationship to the church solidifies a long-standing connection in the Black community. "For Blacks, spirituality fosters a sense of optimism and offers the promise of survival. It is viewed as a buffer in the midst of institutionalized White racism" (Lomotey, 2019). Some of the earliest advocates for the education of Blacks in America were "zealous missionaries who, believing that the message of divine love came equally to all, taught slaves the English language that they might learn the principles of the Christian religion" (Woodson, 1919, p. 2). Northern philanthropists along with Black church leaders established the first Historically Black College and University (HBCU) when creating current day Cheyney State University in 1837 (Akbar & Sims, 2008; Newkirk, 2012). Upon completion of the primary curriculum in such schools, students were offered theological or normal training as the leaders felt ministers and teachers were most important areas by which to prepare the freedmen for life as citizens (Akbar & Sims, 2008; Newkirk, 2012). Even though they were limited, these schools were responsible for "educating the first generation of post-emancipation black leaders" (Newkirk, 2012, p.14)

as they accounted for approximately 90% of Blacks in college, including 85% of Black physicians, 85% of Black teachers, and 75% of Blacks with PhDs.

This group of participants recognized the importance of the community as a village. Each participant works in the community in which they grew up or in a neighboring community with similar social and economic demographics. Each participant revealed that community support was an important factor in them choosing education as a career path. Although study participant Maya did not have children of her own, she played a significant role in "raising" relatives. She expressed being a part of a "village" that contributed to her value system which included obtaining a quality education and helping to raise family members when their parents were not able or capable to do so. Toni was influenced by the age of three by a family friend who served as her pre-school teacher, noting that "a lot of my teaching style was modeled after her." Michelle recalled that she was the "neighborhood tutor." She had summer school for neighborhood friends and "would tutor anyone who needed tutoring." One of her friend's mom offered to pay her for tutoring, validating her role within the village.

When initially denied educational opportunities alongside their White counterparts, Blacks self-educated communally (Darnell, 2017). Black communities pooled their funds to send small groups of young children away to schools that would accept them so that they could learn to read and count. Following the Civil War, Blacks were responsible for raising money to lease land and subsequently build schools upon the land to establish their own schools. It was only after this process that the federal government would force the states to pay for the teacher in such schools (Williams, 2005; Williams & Ashley, 2004).

Blacks have depended heavily on the village for support. Morrison (2007) described the importance of such a village community when addressing master narratives serve to relegate certain persons:

> There can't be anyone, I am sure, who doesn't know what it feels like to be disliked, even rejected, momentarily or for sustained periods of time. Perhaps the feeling is merely indifference, mild annoyance, but it may also be hurt. It may even be that some of us know what it is like to be actually hated—hated for things we have no control over and cannot change. When this happens, it is some consolation to know that the dislike or hatred is unjustified—that you don't deserve it. And if you have the emotional strength and/or support from family and friends, the damage is reduced or erased. We think of it as the stress (minor or disabling) that is part of life as a human.

Historically, Black women who worked tirelessly to ensure that Black children were equipped for success even in the face of adversity (Jean-Marie et al., 2006). These women supplemented inferior equipment and facilities for students even as they mentored others in their communities to ensure respect, education, and success for all (Jean-Marie, 2005). Among the duties in the community, these women taught community members and students how to guard themselves from the prejudice they would encounter, as they supplemented the prescribed curriculum with "community ethics" and "racial pride" (Jean-Marie, 2005; Jean-Marie et al., 2006) much in the way that Ladson-Billings (1995) has described. According to Stanford (1997), these women worked in ways that supported a "community solidarity, community of learners, focus on the whole child, and personal accountability" (p. 108).

Professionally, Maya indicated that success for her had been based on the ability to do specific jobs which were highly respected in the community and doing those jobs well. Thus, she chose to go into the field of education as she was surrounded by educators within her village community. Toni recalled that her biggest narrative was being told that

"You're special" and "You're going to be somebody." Such reassurances heard from such a young age helped her to form a positive disposition which she attempts to pass along to her own students by similar affirmations.

Though their parents and extended village members were overwhelmingly supportive of the participants, there were still issues centered on deficit notions entrenched within the mainstream narratives and textbooks. Those narratives reflected commonly accepted thoughts of the dominant culture at the time and incorrectly theorized that "the white or Caucasian race was considered the paragon of all races: intellectually, morally, and physically superior to all others" (Foster, 1999, p. 256). Deficit notions moderately projected a construct of Blackness that "denied personhood, thus creating an ontological truth that non-Whites were abnormal, childlike and innately inferior to Whites" (King, 2014).

Within White communities, notions of Black inferiority were commonplace. Therefore, it was not surprising that the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* court ruling resulted in the movement of many White students from the public schools to avoid what parents felt would be negative consequences of integration with Black students. This movement was commonly referred to as "white flight" (Duncan & Duncan, 1957; Taeuber & Taeuber, 1965) and occurred in many cities throughout the United States (Andrews, 2002).

The traditional segregated public schools for Blacks tended to have faculty demographics that paralleled that of the student body. As Black bodies were moved into historically White public schools after the *Brown v. the Board of Education* case, many of the majority Black populated segregated schools were closed. One consequence to Black

students was that they were no longer taught by educators who knew them, lived in their neighborhoods, and worshipped with them (hooks, 2004). Instead, they were transported into unfamiliar places, with different and often unwelcoming students, parents, and educators. Many of these people, including those in authority positions, required that these students of color abandon their self-identity for the adoption of the dominant culture standards (hooks, 2004). On the off chance these students were given voice within classroom conversations, they were often objectified and relegated to be the only voice of color within those spaces, assuming the most uncomfortable role of "native informant" (hooks, 1994).

Participants in this study uniformly recalled instances of marginalization even in their younger years. Each spoke of a need to be work harder than others to even be acknowledged. When a Black male custodian was involved in the discipline of Black students at Maya's newly integrated elementary school, she realized that rapid assimilation by Black students was expected. She further recalled that although Black students were few in numbers, they were routinely separated by classes and then again within classes. Although Maya remembered fitting in with her peers and being accepted by many of them, she also remembered "my White teachers seeing that bond, trying to break that up." Toni recalled an elementary teacher yelling at her when she raised her hand for clarification on a question. Rather than ascertain the root of Toni's question, the teacher simply assumed that Toni wanted help on the assignment rather than clarification. The teacher's response was to yell, "The answer is in the book!" Such instances affected each of the young scholars in ways which led them to develop counter-narratives of resiliency to address such marginalization for themselves and others.

Participants indicated they constructed counter narratives of resiliency through actions and word to address the marginalization they experienced. Those counter-narratives were created to shield others from the experiences they had encountered. The counter-narrative Maya constructed to address the marginalization she received from specific teachers, was “to be positive in my interactions with children as well as staff and parents and administrators.” She described that her main objective was to present herself “as a positive, approachable person.” In this way, Maya wanted to ensure that those around her (students, peers, administrators, parents) did not feel separated from her as she did her fifth-grade teacher. To address the teacher’s response to raising her hand for clarification of an assignment, Toni described how she intentionally responds to her students: “even if they don’t know the answer, I give them time to think and then, if they don’t know the answer, I might give them a clue.” Michelle’s counter-narrative exemplified an ability to look through disruptive narratives to seek better outcomes for herself and her students. She explained that she, as a Black female educator, simply had a different perspective, because “we have had to go through things that other people haven’t.” Because of that, “We've always had a different outlook.”

Collective Black counter-narratives of these participants alongside many others have served generationally as the basis of strength, determination, and perseverance within the Black community. Though selectively excluded from mainstream elementary and secondary curriculum, excellence in Black education has long been exemplified through counter-narratives of resiliency from notable female scholars, educators and activist such as Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Charlotte Hawkins Brown.

In response to the first sub-question "How do the descriptions of personal narratives from three elementary educators contribute to their personal identities?" the analyzed data indicated that the participant educators' identities have been co-constructed through oral narratives handed down to them through familial and communal engagement as well as those co-created by them. The participant descriptions of personal narratives indicate that they identify as spiritual beings bound to the communities in which they willingly live and serve. They have maintained high standards for themselves and their students regardless of position or place. Further, they have excelled at constructing counter-narratives which rightfully acknowledge and target systemic marginalization within their educational spaces and the larger communities in which they reside.

Perceptions

Participants in this study acknowledged that the perceptions of others significantly impacted their daily lives. Although they did not accept the perceptions, they were routinely situated to address those perceptions along with the implication of those perceptions in the regular course of business.

Each of the participants indicated that addressing issues of stereotyping was paramount to them because such notions of inferiority not only affected them but was perpetuated onward toward their students. Using events which occurred throughout their lives, participants incorporated strategies and lessons which acknowledged and debunked specific stereotypes which depicted anger, laziness, and incapability which largely targeted traditionally marginalized populations, especially Black females. Michelle stated that mischaracterization of marginalized populations through stereotyping made those

people “the target.” She further explained that “loud” for marginalized populations was routinely characterized as “excitement” for non-marginalized groups and treated starkly different. Such stereotypes easily lended themselves as teachable moments for students of color to “try to get them to understand that we are looked at differently because of our color.” The value in such pedagogy was not reserved for students of color, however. Such teachable moments were meant to identify and address stereotypes so that all students recognized them and the harm they caused.

Additionally, participants indicated they dealt with systemic stereotyping which not only questioned them, and their performance but also questioned their ability levels. Each reported that they worked “twice as hard” at their positions. They also reported that their responses to specific questions and situations have been further validated “as if they still have to get that answer from someone else before it’s believed.” Maya indicated that staff felt she was “incapable” of facilitating an effective counseling program evidenced by suggestions as to what “she should do with her program” in conversations and on end of the year teacher surveys. She further indicated that several tasks relegated to other counselors at other sites were assigned to other personnel at her site. As a result, she felt she was effectively rendered voiceless.

Similarly, Toni thought that “some people do not value my opinion.” She thought that the biggest stereotype as a Black female educator was that “we don’t know how to educate students or even that our opinions are not valued.” Even the validity of a peer’s educational attainment was questioned because it was earned through an on-line higher education program though many of the educators working at this site and surrounding sites had obtained their credentials in an identical fashion. The assertions appeared to

introduce and then further a narrative that the Black female educator was not qualified even though "most of the educators that we work with—if they do have a degree higher than an undergrad, they got it online."

Michelle explained that such generalizations do not affect Black female educators in isolation; they extend to perceptions and actions which significantly impact all students. Michelle further explained how such generalizations surpass simply affecting Black female educators and extend to perceptions and actions which directly impact students. She reflected how a group of Black males in the hallway were automatically assumed to be "up to no good" though the same presumption was rarely projected onto other groups of students on campus. Such assumptions made about the Black males lended themselves to "policing" of specific students in academic and non-academic capacities including their physical placement in classrooms.

Though incapable of successfully addressing every notion of inferiority encountered without feeding into other stereotypes which indicate Black females are angry or confrontational, participants sought to dispel these notions through pedagogical practices and intentional conversations. Still, participants realized that sometimes it was necessary "to look at the outlook—the positive outlook of things and just let it be" as Michelle described.

Many educators of color have been long burdened by longstanding, racial and gendered stereotypes. These stereotypes are easily recognized even though they may not be explicitly named (Harris-Perry, 2011; Lewis & Neville, 2015; Parks, 2010). The purpose served by such stereotypes has been to identify and marginalize Black women through race and gender in comparison to White men, White women, and Black men

(Jordan-Zachery, 2009) and have resulted in "cultural symbols of black womanhood" which "serve to mask and normalize the inequitable position of black women" (p. 27).

Participants indicated that dealing with issues of race were commonplace. From attending segregated schools to attending newly integrated schools, Maya noticed a profound difference in the treatment she received in each educational space. In the segregated school, she was welcomed into a community of learners with shared backgrounds and objectives. In the newly integrated space, she felt a separatist demeanor from adults and was consistently reminded that she was felt to be inferior to her White counterparts as a student and later as an educator. Dismissive attitudes were the most common characteristics noticed by all participants. Toni reflected that these challenges included "people not liking me because of the color of my skin. You know, even before they got to know me" which led to people "not valuing my opinion. Each of the participants thrived despite having "to keep that in the back of your mind but then again not let it weigh you down."

Prior research implies even young children are cognizant of racial differences (Banks, 2016; Clark & Clark, 1939). As educators are ever-present in the daily lives of their students, educator perceptions are indicative of the types of influence all students experience regarding issues of race and power (Greene, Burke, & McKenna, 2013). Accordingly, the challenges experienced by the participants and the ways in which they respond to those challenges are critical to students. Deliberate action by educators to influence the developing views about differences are necessary to prevent negative racial attitudes from becoming ingrained in children (Aboud, Mendelson, & Purdy, 2003; Banks, 2016; Clark & Clark, 1939).

In addition to dealing with perceptions regarding stereotypes and race, Black female educators included in this study encounter issues concerning gender as well. Though teaching has conventionally been a profession dominated by women, participants recognized issues of gender equity which concerned them. Maya believed that women were expected to accomplish more than men especially at the elementary school level. "It's expected... a lot more is asked" both "on the building level AND district-wide." At the elementary level, participants recognized that the uncompensated extra attention to detail which was required to create visually stimulating environments and oversee clubs was expected and largely unfunded while activities such as sports at the higher levels provided participants with stipends. Toni suggested that "just thinking that ladies are less than" concurrently led to men occupying many of the leadership roles in which they continued to make decisions for their primarily female staffs.

Additionally, participants found intersectionality of race and gender led to further problematic stereotyping behavior. To the extent that each issue was evident and troublesome, the mingling of issues compounded their roles as they were not treated equitably with their male or with their White counterparts. Those participants' lifetimes of lived experience on specific issues, they were treated as novice. Not only were they seldom if ever engaged as leaders on these issues, they were further subjugated to the same professional development as those who have extremely limited capacity to lead. Toni reflected that the general disposition she noticed was "that we are not important. And again, back to what I said before...opinions not valued as a female or as a Black woman. That's been one of my biggest challenges since I have been teaching."

Intersectionality was experienced uniquely by each Black female educator. Although there have been important, historically relevant instances in which White women worked in solidarity with their Black sisters, there have been other instances in which White women turned their backs on their counterparts. In Canterbury, CT, when White parents restricted their students from attending alongside the Black girls, Crandall continued to teach until she was jailed (Davis, 1981). Margaret Douglass was imprisoned in Norfolk, VA, when she operated a school for Black students; Myrtilla Miner sought to establish a Black teacher's college in Washington, DC, after she had already illegally taught Black children in Mississippi (Davis, 1981). Still, though Elizabeth Cady Stanton had joined in the fought for the rights of women and the abolishment of slavery, notions of solidarity diminished substantially when slaves in the South were emancipated. Stanton no longer aligned with her Black female counterparts and actively campaigned against suffrage for Blacks (Davis, 1981).

Being a minority female educator is sometimes viewed as a double-disadvantage (Raccah-Addi, 2005). However, the intersectionality of factors such as race and gender provides a deeper understanding of perception on the part of Black female educators (Witherspoon & Mitchell, 2009). The perceptions of these educators include the internal self-perception including the unique histories these educators bring to their pedagogy and how those histories assist them in constructing, negotiating and re-negotiating their identities contextually (Agee, 2004; Goodson, 1992; Zancanella, 1991). The perceptions also include external self-perception related to the individual's Self, which is "constructed among shifting social contexts that make demands on an individual's agency, social responsibility, and ethical positioning" interaction to the surrounding

world (Agee, 2004; Gergen, 1989; Illeris, 2014). The agency of the individual is viewed by Shotter (1989) as a constructed Self, responding to the sense of the Other. The Black female educators' identity, constructed in relation to their community, school, colleagues, and students, often differ from White educators for multiple reasons.

Among the reasons are these educators encounter deeply-embedded, harmful ideologies in mainstream teacher education programs that lack clarity on teaching as a political act (Bartolome' & Trueba, 2000) and signal that minority educators are outsiders regarding what counts in school and society (Agee, 2004). As the dominant discourse of mainstream curriculum assumes that the educator is White (Agee, 2004), the experiences of traditionally marginalized Black educators and other educators of color are ignored through the few references and discussions about how educators of color are positioned to question such standards of best practice within which they are largely absent (Agee, 2004; Delpit, 1995).

Additionally, the Black female educators' identity differs because racial bias often positions the Black educators' approach toward multicultural education for diverse students differently than their White counterparts. Importantly, the Black female educator's approach is routinely regarded as lacking. Ladson-Billings wrote that a White male colleague claimed that "he could probably address or teach race, class, and gender more successfully than she, a Black teacher, because students would perceive his approach as scholarly; whereas they would see a Black teacher as self-interested, bitter, or having a political agenda" (Agee, 2004, p. 750). This was evidenced by participants who reported they were seldom if ever requested to "lead" but routinely required to

"follow" except in instances when they were required to explain the whole or even fragments of the intersectionality of their being to all others (Cook, 2013).

Common among study participants was the need to deal with misconception that all Black people have one solitary experience, regardless of social, economic, or professional practices. Michelle reflected that because "there is not enough diversity amongst our educators" many of the teachers looked at "students who do not come from the backgrounds that they come from…based on generalizations" that did not assume the best of diverse students.

When a recent Black guest speaker spoke of overcoming issues on a path to success, participants reflected that their peers overgeneralized that singular experience to extend to all Blacks, without regard to distinguishing social or economic factors which were evident. Maya described that her peers did not receive messages as she perceived they were intended. Whereas she saw the distinctions within the narratives spun by guest speakers, others perceived that "alright, here's another Black woman who was a child in a poverty-stricken, uneducated and that's another one of those...that was another one of those stories." Furthermore, she perceived that resolve to make a difference in multiple children's lives was not similarly received by others. Whereas Maya felt that it became her calling to make a difference in a child's life, she felt her co-workers did not perceive the same urgency to make a difference with those same children. Rather, it was simply perceived that certain child was "unfortunate" and that because there was "no telling what's going on at home…you just let it go." Similarly, she reflected that discussions among co-workers after listening to such guest speakers indicated her co-workers

perceived “all African American employees had the same encounter, like this is always where we came from.”

Educators who have failed to acknowledge the multiple differences within educator and student populations, have often failed to address those educators and students appropriately. Thus, co-workers such as those who have been participants in this research have become alienated or frustrated and students have become increasingly disengaged in the learning. Although there were a few ethnically diverse employees at the research participants’ work sites, those employees were consistently expected to speak for the vast experiences of others throughout the school and throughout the communities in which they or the students lived. As co-workers perceived there was little difference in the lives of this small group of employees and people who looked like them throughout the nation, these small groups of employees were expected to explain issues pertaining to economics, race, health-care, and housing surfaced to their counterparts regularly though their perceptions were often challenged.

As research participants attempted to maximize the academic potential of each of their students, they indicated that they faced dilemmas which were directly impacted by their perceptions and their identity even as their identities were generalized as monolith. An example of this dilemma was the fact that they were consistently evaluated by teacher rubrics which ignored or downplayed significant pedagogical factors such as “political clarity, oppositional consciousness and sense of urgency, and connectedness” that are engrained within the historic and contemporary lived experiences of African descended people (Acosta, 2018, p. 26). These employees represent diversity in their respective

institutions even as they battle becoming “complicit” in facilitating structures they have been engaged in destroying.

Another dilemma faced by participants was in social assimilation expectations. Because upward mobility within the educational profession is social in nature, Black women have long been expected to both acknowledge and adhere to the norms of those of other cultures. This is not limited to socializing at events, institutions, and organizations which are not represented within their own communities (Glazer-Ramo, 2001). As Black women belong as members to a stigmatized group already contending with hypervisibility imposed by perceived lower social status, they are commonly perceived as “other” even as they attempt to assimilate. This is highlighted by the symbolic identification of a Black woman as “the odd one at your Sunday Brunches” (Harris-Perry, 2011; Rushin, 1981).

Described contextually worse than an adherence to monolithic experiences was invisibility. While participants were recognized incorrectly in a monolithic generalization, they were ignored fully through invisibility. Participants reflected that perceptions of others left them feeling as though they were not heard or seen. Each acknowledged that administrators rarely included Blacks in key leadership and administrative positions at their sites. Additionally, when participants attempted to enlighten their peers about their culture, their attempts were largely ignored with a few exceptions. Therefore, participants felt as though they were often “unseen” and recognized that groups of students did as well.

Powers and Duffy (2016) explained that “learning is dependent upon a sense of well-being in the classroom” (p. 61). Further, students who feel “insecure, marginalized,

invisible, threatened, and/or disenfranchised" experience barriers to learning (p. 61). Earlier research indicates that substantial numbers of students fail to have their needs met because educators are either unaware or unresponsive to those needs, thus rendering the students and their needs invisible (Griffin, 2012; Elish-Piper, Matthews, & Risko, 2013; Yull, Wilson, Murray, & Parham 2018). For similar students to attain academic success, participants have intentionally gone above and beyond to include their cultural capital and experiences in lieu of the otherwise inevitable void.

Actions

Regarding issues which originated through the perceptions of others, participants described actions developed to address such issues. First, the educators understood the hidden power structures which support institutions of oppression (Illeris, 2014). Then, they sought to address the cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of oppressive structures which were positioned in education, aligned with the Black woman, and served to frame important social issues and further specific ideology (Jordan-Zachery, 2009; Harris-Perry, 2011) by discussing and demonstrating how their culture and perceptions differed from their co-workers. Maya and Michelle each explained that after years of skirting around offensive actions they now addressed the issues directly. By doing so, participants directly addressed stereotypical images and coded language used to perpetuate them as they sought to impact their co-workers, administrators, and students. This narrative sharing which addresses the cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of specific ideologies serves as "a form of psychic preservation" as it affirms the reality and maintains sanity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Cook, 2013).

In response to the second research sub-question, "How do participants describe the ways in which personal identities affect their perceptions of academic success for their students?" the data obtained in this study indicates that research participants encountered multiple social constructs which were detrimental to them professionally and to their students' academic success. However, the multiple experience Black women have had addressing specific ideologies and perceptions and how those ideologies and perceptions work to relegate some, enable them to be acutely aware of ways in which they can identify and address similar issues experienced by diverse student populations. Though each participant had avoided reacting to others' negative perceptions early in their careers, they now engaged in actions which questioned rather than perpetuated such notions for themselves and their students. Participants realized their actions spoke not only for themselves as individuals but also for students who were and would be confronted with similar if not identical issues. Although challenged with issues of stereotyping, each participant worked tirelessly to debunk traditional notions of inferiority regarding their race, gender, and the intersectionality of the two. Participants actively proved that generalizations of all people into simple categories with monolithic experiences was inappropriate for students and staff alike. Though their actions were distinct and varied, their collective responses rendered them, and thereby their students, visible in spaces they had previously been expected to blindly assimilate.

The multiple experiences Black female educators have encountered do not deny the possibility that other educators can effectively teach diverse students. However, these lived experiences uniquely situate Black female educators to advocate for diverse students while emphasizing appropriate academic instruction for all learners and service-

learning which connects the voices and lived experiences of the classroom to the larger community (Robinson, 2013).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy allowed participants to continuously evaluate their perceptions and adjust their pedagogical practices accordingly. This pedagogy includes curriculum and instruction that bridged the student's home life and values of the school and classroom (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Such practices are contextualized through the diversity of the classroom community. Further, these practices allow for multiple perspectives, as well as numerous representations that are reflective of the larger world. The participants in this study explained that spending significant amounts of time with their students help them show students they were cared about as individual, as part of their cultural group, and as a valuable part of the learning community. This was essential to promoting student learning within the parameters of the power dynamics such as those that exist in schools (Nieto, 1999). Building relationships with students in this way encouraged and enabled students to find and express their voice as they recognized, constructed, and conveyed their narrative (Mitchell, Hinueber, & Edwards, 2017).

One way that participants worked to include all students was through differentiation in the teaching. Participants in this study noted that they focused on teaching to individual students' strengths. Although specific topics are necessarily taught at specific times during the student's time in elementary school, the ways in which the topics are addressed varied.

Maya looked for multiple perspectives from which to teach. This included using a variety of materials and authors. Maya specifically sought materials such as books which were told from a female perspective, which included the cultures of non-Whites, and which catered to various learning styles. She also concentrated on "taking time" with her students to ensure understanding. Toni stated that her primary objective was to "get to know" her students before she attempted to teach them anything. Then, she deliberately allowed her students "think time" which encouraged them to ponder their responses so that they were more carefully constructed. She instructed them, checked for understanding, and listened to them repeat those instructions in their own words. Doing so allowed her the ability to clarify her expectations. Toni explained that differentiation was not unique to a few struggling students in her learning community but that it was embedded in her pedagogy.

Similarly, Michelle explained that she considered herself a "bridge" from where her students were to where they needed to be. As such, she used various strategies to engage them. She described the incorporation of photographs so that students could strengthen and connect appropriate vocabulary to the curriculum. Michelle and Toni both brought materials into the classroom community so that students who had not encountered certain experiences could build developmentally appropriate background knowledge suitable for pending instruction. Further, she included images and information from the internet to supplement prescribed lessons.

The main goal of differentiated instruction has been described as maximizing "the growth and individual success of all students" (Bogen, Schlendorf, Nicolino, & Morote, 2019, p.18). Those authors further described differentiation as "a teacher's reacting

responsively to a learner's needs" (p. 18). Differentiation has proven effective in ensuring all students are achieving proficiency in academics (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008). Although differentiation should be an integral component of a successful, inclusive classroom community, participants in this study noted the lack of differentiation for diverse students in classrooms other than their own.

It is believed that lack of training in differentiation strategies coupled with the low comfort level of teachers using differentiation are primary factors for teachers currently underutilizing this key instructional component. This is especially true for teachers new to differentiation techniques as they often misunderstand techniques or lack the skills to use the techniques effectively (Hertberg-Davis, 2009; West & West, 2016). Regardless of the reasons behind the lack of quality differentiation strategies in these classrooms, participants believed that diverse students suffer when they are not taught and then accessed in ways which consider their strengths rather than traditional means which teach and access from deficit models.

Participants understood the importance of including the lived experiences of students within the learning experiences in their classrooms. They were intentional in incorporating cues from their students' collective communities in the curriculum each year. This included the students' cultural capital (Moll & Arnot-Hopffer, 2005). Brown, Hurst, and Hail (2016) described cultural capital as "the process of consciously socializing children to develop social assets such as talent, intellect, style of speech, and academic competencies" which are critical pieces of "more elite societies" (p. 116). Prior research suggests that parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds place a premium value on their children's' P-16 educational attainment compared to parents from lower

socioeconomic backgrounds. As a result, those parents tend to socialize their children to meet those expectations (Lareau, 2011). Participants noted that this was true in their experiences. Participants suggested that because teachers at their sites identified and associated with members of higher socioeconomic backgrounds, they recognized the cultural capital from students which more closely resembled their own, often overlooking and devaluing the cultural capital that students who differed from them brought to various learning experiences. Furthermore, participants recognized that those students who differed were considered to lack necessary capital and were accordingly taught from a deficit perspective.

Just as important, participants understood the importance of including their personal lived experiences in their pedagogy. Maya explained the importance of being exposed to segregated and desegregated schools and learning to be successful in each situation: "Those qualities have helped me in the class by being able to adapt. Because I have [been] in diverse settings, I can address my kids equally." Furthermore, Michelle indicated her lived experiences demonstrated that her resilience was necessarily shared with students. She explained that she "went through trials and tribulations" and "had to learn on my own that that's not really the pathway that I needed to be on…but all of that contributed...ah...to making me who I am ...into the person that I think I've formed into today."

Merryfield (2000) spoke of Max van Manen's work stating the following:

> Various thinkers have noted that lived experience first of all has a temporal structure: it can never be grasped in its immediate manifestation but only reflectively as past presence …Lived experience is the breathing of meaning…Thus a lived experience has a certain essence, a 'quality' that we gain in retrospect. (1990, p. 36)

Further, Merryfield stated that "one's identity and context of power shape how experiences are interpreted so that experiences in themselves have no essentialist effect or meaning" (p. 431). Rather, it is the telling of the experiences as one's own narrative that the person and the experience become one. DuBois (1989) explained that Black children grew up aware of their own culture taught by family and community as well as the White culture they were mandated to understand, respect, and assimilate to. Those expectations described by DuBois continue in contemporary classroom learning communities. The realization of the prevalence of such expectations was foundational to participants in this study bringing their experiences to life. Not only do these narratives of experience benefit Black students, they also assist other students from differing backgrounds gain authentic understanding into the lives of their educators.

Participants were hyper-focused on creating relationships with students within their educational spaces. Participants' intentionality of developing relationships with students and families was essential to their craft and beneficial for all students. Michelle asserted that students "have different viewpoints" that are established due to the various experiences they have encountered outside of school. Unwilling to blame them for such experiences, she insisted that creating relationships helped her "raise them up" prior to teaching them so that they remained engaged in the learning. Participants proved that regarding schools, our "success hinges on our ability to build effective relationships with students (Sterrett, 2012, p. 72). Such quality relationships with students help teachers and administrators shift from discipline driven programs as educators examine their "vision, actions, and assumptions about students" (p. 72).

Participants in this study believed in and demonstrated their high teacher self-efficacy, or their "belief in their skills and ability to positively influence students' learning and outcomes" (Sosa & Gomez, 2012). To execute a goal or a skill effectively, a sense of self-efficacy must accompany knowledge and skill (Bandura, 1993). Pajares (1992) found additionally that those with a high sense of self-efficacy challenged themselves even more than others by setting high goals and then putting forth the effort to achieve those set goals. Importantly, student academic outcomes have been related to the teacher's self-efficacy (Pajares, 1992). Because influence from the overall school environment along with the influence from colleagues, administration, and other students directly influence efficacy, "what teachers believe about students' capabilities also influences their beliefs about their success in teaching them" (Sosa & Gomez, 2012, p. 880). The ability of the participants in this study to block out the negative connotations and to look for the good in their students allowed them to set high expectations for learning. The relationships they formed with their students encouraged their students to work toward setting and reaching their own goals and expectations.

Because there was not much diversity at each of the participant's work sites, participants understood the importance of representation. They understood that their students whether consciously or not looked to them for acceptance, leadership, and support. Each of the participants stated that they had a Black female educator early in their educational career. Toni stated, "They started saying that we needed one Black teacher to teach in schools. So, I think they were just going to put us in the schools just to say they had that one African American teacher, not realizing that by putting us in the schools it was going to uplift our children, children of diversity, even just seeing us." In

this sense, participants understood the importance of seeing someone who looked like them represent them in positive roles.

Each acknowledged the importance of inviting other Black females into the field of education. Maya's suggested that future educators be true to themselves. "I think that if you are genuine, and if you like what you're doing, do what you do genuinely. No pretenses." She went further to state, "I know the students will accept the real you and they can identify the false you. They know what real and they know what's false and you'll be able to see that so just be you." She also suggested that students "learn about people who differ from you." She insisted that diverse students not "give up who you are, you know, just to try to fit in. Do what you're told but don't give up your, your beliefs for...to just be like someone else."

A welcome consequence for Black students in segregated schools was that they were taught by educators who knew them, lived in their neighborhoods, and worshipped with them (hooks, 2004). After desegregation, Black students were routinely transported into unfamiliar places, with different and often unwelcoming educators, parents, and students. Many if not all of these people required that these students of color abandon their self-identity for the adoption of the dominant culture standards (hooks, 2004). If these students were ever given voice within classroom conversations, they were often objectified and relegated to be the singular voice of color within those spaces, assuming the most uncomfortable role of "native informant" (hooks, 1994). Contemporary students benefit from Black female educators because the likelihood of such situations is negated significantly simply by their presence.

Though frustrated with issues of equity and diversity in the workplace, each of the participants reported that they continued to work not only for their love of education but fundamentally for the responsibility they felt for their students. Toni described one of her important responsibilities as "meeting the needs of all of my students... and meeting them where they come from." This included building collaborative relationships with parents and community stakeholders. Even in her personal time, Toni found herself taking on the responsibility of teaching to parents, guardians, and others. "Some people ask me like 'How do you do it in your classroom?' or 'How do you teach this certain skill?' that I'm teaching." She took on this additional role of facilitating instruction to caretakers because she understood that "everybody is not taught, and they don't know. And that doesn't mean that there is something wrong with them because they don't know...but I would tell them." She added that she often offered strategies for family members to use at home to aid in the students' success.

Within the Black community, educators historically bore the responsibility of providing leadership. In the public as well as the private school sector, these educators took both the responsibility and accountability of the educational achievement of adults and children attending their schools (Siddle-Walker, 2000; Tillman, 2004). Traditionally, Black mothers blended words of support with strict discipline so that their children would obey. Additionally, they raised their children with a strong sense of social responsibility for their community and a priority on the family (Hubbard, 2009). The responsibility the Black female has assumed for society collectively and especially for the entirety of the race cannot be understated. Cooper (1892) described, "Now the fundamental agency under God in the regeneration, the re-training of the race, as well as the groundwork and

starting point of its progress upward, must be the *black woman*" (p. 28). Even further, she stated, "Only the Black woman can say 'when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me'" (Cooper, p. 31).

The relationships, the representation, and the responsibility that each participant chose to foster toward their students are components of the ethic of care they continue to employ. Maya felt that students fell through gaps when they did not have those underlying issues addressed. She recalled that a specific student did not have his immediate medical needs met at school causing academic concern. As he was absent, his instruction was not altered which resulted in a proficiency gap for him. Not willing to stand aside as a student was identifiably marginalized, Maya intervened on the students' behalf. From Maya's point of view, she tried to "be that person that's going to encourage them and to help them." She felt that other educators maintained a disposition that "that's just more than they want to be bothered with." She felt reasonable in her assumption that those educators felt "I want to deal with this, but I don't want to deal with that, that underlying issue."

Toni's specific care for her diverse students first included "loving them and nurturing them." She recognized that "you have some kids who haven't had the proper rest or food to eat. You have to meet that need first, before you go into the academics." She didn't think many of her fellow educators understood that. Toni insisted that she was responsive to students with behavioral issues. She stated, "I know how to work with kids who come in with behavioral issues. It doesn't necessarily mean that they are bad. You have to get to know that child, to see why they're acting out. Usually, it's a reason." Toni

further acted to control the narrative of problematic behavior in her students. She encouraged her students' parents to have their children say strategically chosen mottos in the mirror each morning and each night before they went to bed to negate talk that students otherwise encountered. For ELL students, Toni advocated that they needed more time to experience success in their language development. She attributed these actions to "breaking strongholds" that relegated her students.

Similarly, Michelle stated that she routinely dealt with issues that happened out of school so that her students could experience success within the classroom. Realizing that students were not sleeping well due to on-going circumstances in their neighborhood or that certain students were paralyzed and terrorized by the mere sight or sound of a police car led Michelle to adapt her pedagogy to foster the needs of these students. She stated that she regularly acted as an advocate for those students by taking their needs into consideration as she engaged in "those conversations with people that I feel like are my allies, in hopes that you will understand that these kids have so much. They have a different upbringing."

Among the tenets of the ethic of care expressed by Gilligan (1982) are that the self and other are treated equally, that things will be fair regardless of differences in power, that everyone will be included and responded to, and that no one will be hurt or left alone. Apple and Christian-Smith (1991) stated that the relationship between power and education is manifest in the "struggles by women, people of color, and others …to have their history included in the curriculum" (p. 2). Further research indicates that educators have long sought to engage students by bringing their interest and voices into mainstream conversations (Agee, 2004; Sanacore, 2004). Sanacore (2004) reflected that

students who knew that adults cared about them helped them to form trusting relations and helped form essential foundations for learning even when they experienced increased challenges in their personal lives such as dynamic family structures, personal conflicts, and deteriorating mental health conditions. Furthermore, genuine caring has been identified as a specific, successful way to enhance student achievement (Gilligan, 1982; Roberts, 2010; Sanacore, 2004).

Importantly, Noddings (2002) noted that two seemingly similar students in a classroom community could require much different forms of care from the teacher. Teacher care, then, included understanding the needs, desires, and nature of students while understanding the power structures which signify that one party belongs to a group that has historical domination or power over the other. This caring is "embedded in reciprocal relationships and requires a certain amount of trade in kind" (Noddings, 2002). Such awareness positions the teacher to address the varying cultural and educational needs of diverse students (Roberts, 2010). Prior to *Brown vs. Board of Education*, this ethic of care was characterized by several distinct actions. Among those actions was a steadfastness to including culturally relevant pedagogy within the classroom, establishing and maintaining unwaveringly high expectations for students, participating in and living within the surrounding community, serving as intercessors for students, and introducing socio-political critiques which directly concerned the students (King, 1993; Siddle Walker, 2000). Contemporary students benefit from similar acts of care (Roberts, 2010).

Data collected in response to the final sub-question "How does each participant's perception of academic success affect their pedagogy?" revealed that there was a persistent tone-deaf culture within their educational communities toward the necessary

practices that facilitate academic excellence for diverse students. This tone deafness led each participant to take individual action to better ensure academic success for students. For participants, this meant teaching to the whole child rather than simply teaching prescribed standards or curriculum chronologically. Each employed culturally responsive pedagogical practices to better connect with students. Among those practices' participants deemed appropriate and necessary were differentiation, including the lived experiences of the student and the educator, relationships, representation, responsibility, and an ethic of care.

Implications for Practice

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the personal narratives of a small group of Black female educators regarding their experiences teaching as minority educators in depth. As oral and written narratives are longstanding staples in the Black community (Ani, 1994; Harris-Perry, 2011), it was believed that such narratives could explain how specific educators framed their perceptions and their pedagogy for diverse students.

Due to the project's small number of participants and the qualitative design, the findings from this project cannot be generalized to other settings but may be relevant and transferrable to those settings with like characteristics (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). There were implications for practice which emerged from this research. It is believed that the results of this research project will evoke new ways of thinking about the further inclusion of Black female voices in traditional educational spaces to positively influence the overall educational experience of students as well as other Black female educators.

According to Siegel-Hawley (2016) and Ladson-Billings (2009), education as a field and a practice still results as a political act in the United States whereas funding is often tied to community value and congressional favor. In a country that still allows and arguably encourages economic success at the expense of its weakest and most vulnerable members, schools are but a reflection of the larger communities in which they exist (Freire, 1970). Thus, the more economically stable communities which often lie in non-urban areas frequently house the more immaculate schools in neighborhoods which are commonly perceived as better (Lareau, 2011). The students, faculty, and stakeholders of these fine facilities enjoy the most extensive programming, lower employee turnover rates, and significantly fewer educational and social related stigmas. These schools are less likely to employ prison-like restraints and surveillance—including metal detectors and resource officers as agents of compliance—than their poorer, more urban counterparts (Morris, 2016). Accordingly, students in these schools are less likely to experience the traumas of the others at less prosperous schools, including those which designate them as "failing schools" with "at-risk" student populations as is customarily done with their urban and rural counterpart schools.

Located outside many of these urban and suburban school areas, yet within sight of neighboring rural areas lie numbers of exurban schools. These schools share the common challenges and concerns of their more rural, suburban, and urban counterparts. Among these concerns are the fact that those in charge of decision-making within the classrooms at these sites remain "mismatched" when compared to the makeup of the student population at those same sites (Kozlowki, 2015; Milner & Hoy, 2003). Research linking this mismatch or "incongruence of student and teacher race, ethnicity, and

cultural background" links negative teacher perception and lower expectations for Black and Latino students (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013; Valdes, 1996). Research has also indicated that damaging perceptions of students may manifest in carefully veiled microaggressions which directly and negatively impact specific students (Bryant, Triplett, Watson, & Lewis, 2017; Sue et al., 2008; Torres et al., 2010). This collective research indicates that there exists an underrecognized space and a need for more Black female educators who not only match but also recognize, understand, and efficiently address to the needs of culturally diverse students in these schools.

The participants in this study indicate Black female educators have a plethora of lived experiences which often mirror those of their students. The high self-efficacy of these educators allows them to believe that the successes they have experienced are transferrable to the students whom they teach (Sosa & Gomez, 2012). They have demonstrated the ability to recognize and then cater to the strengths rather than the weaknesses of their students. Through encounters in which they constantly and consistently demonstrate the capability necessary to bridge students home life with that of the school, they prove a valuable resource to students and schools alike (Emdin, 2017; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2012).

Currently, schools are being run remarkably like the way they were designed years ago without regard to the traditions which are and will likely continue to be unwavering and unwelcoming to the diverse populations they now serve (hooks, 2004; Banks, 2016). Although the growing body of the public school is representative of increasing diversity, approximately 82% of the teaching force in the United States remains female, middle class, monolingual, and White (Bryant et al., 2017; Cochran-

Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004; Dharamshi, 2018; Rogers, 2013). Consequently, educators are often required to teach students who differ substantially from them. Some of these educators do well in this regard; however, numerous others lack the necessary cultural awareness or competence to effectively facilitate social justice (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Additional others show resistance to doing so for several reasons. Among the reasons are their familiarity with traditional modes which has bred complacency or their simple deep investment in maintaining the status quo (Jones & Enriquez, 2009; Staples, 2010).

When five-year-old students begin public schooling in the United States, they are likely sorted and then taught based on familial, economic, and societal influences (Lareau, 2011). As the prescribed curriculum is taught and it is the duty and obligation of the educator to recognize the student's strengths and weaknesses and to provide the correct differentiation (Banks, 2016). The students, then, are at the mercy of the educator in the classroom to ensure a quality educational experience. Too often, however, the educator in the classroom lacks the cultural capital to cater to students who differ from them because they lack the lived experiences that allow them to see, understand, and teach to the needs of each student (Emdin, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Prior research indicates even young children are aware of racial differences (Banks, 2016; Clark & Clark, 1939). Taking deliberate action to influence the developing views about differences is necessary to prevent negative racial attitudes from becoming ingrained in children (Aboud, Mendelson, & Purdy, 2003; Banks, 2016; Clark & Clark, 1939). Because teachers' perceptions are indicative of the types of influence the students will experience regarding issues of race and power (Greene, Burke, & McKenna, 2013)

and because the materials used and the ways in which teachers present those materials largely determine the atmosphere in which students construct such information (Banks, 2016), Black female educators are uniquely situated to link experience and practice through personal narratives which address personal identity, perception of academic success, and pedagogy.

As public-school student populations continue to reflect the browning of America, the educators and administrators in those spaces should more closely align with and better include the voices of those represented within those student demographics. Additionally, the curriculum needs to more accurately represent the true and relevant experiences of historically minority cultures told from their perspectives no matter how difficult those lessons are presumed to be. It is negligible to insist that students continue to learn information which is inaccurate at best and intentionally misleading at worst and then penalize them by labeling them "at risk" or "failing."

Insights

Prior research reveals that some students fail to have their needs met by educators due to the educators being either unaware or unresponsive to the needs of those students (Elish-Piper, Matthews, & Risko, 2013; Griffin, 2012; Yull, Wilson, Murray, & Parham 2018). For these students to achieve academic success, other educators have shouldered the responsibility to address the unmet needs of the students. This is especially significant for students when those educators share cultural knowledge and experience (Delpit, 1995; Emdin, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The personal narratives of the participants in this study have proven instrumental in the construct of their personal identities. Further,

notions of personal identity have helped to explain how the educators situated their perceptions of academic success for their students while they acknowledged and addressed perceived gaps.

For years, the participants in this study developed relationships with students and co-workers through the incorporation and sharing of culturally responsive pedagogical practices. To incorporate the lived experiences of students within the classroom community, they shared more of their personal lived experiences with their students and co-workers. Through this vulnerability and immersion into the educators' cultural backgrounds, students have become increasingly willing to share their fears, their goals, and the obstacles they face in realizing their goals (Banks, 2016).

Through this research, it was determined that the participants and the researcher shared homophily or "the notion that individuals sharing beliefs, values, qualities, background or social class are more likely to better communicate and relate to each other" (Lomotey, 2019). As African descended people, we shared common experiences which included a belief in religion and spirituality as the "backbone" of Black family and culture (Spicer, 2004). We further believed that our central focus on spirituality, family and community was essential and positively contributed to our success (Shujaa & Shujaa, 2015). Importantly, we vividly recalled childhood trauma we experienced, which continued to shape our pedagogy in positive ways. We were resilient because of those traumas and we were determined to ensure that other students, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, religion, creed, or heritage, did not experience those same or similar traumas on our watch. That determination manifested as an ethic of care which has been identified as a specific, successful way to enhance student achievement

(Gilligan, 1982; Roberts, 2010; Sanacore, 2004). Our self-efficacy grew with each student we helped in their endeavor for academic success (Sosa & Gomez, 2002).

Most significantly, however, insight was gained in acknowledging how difficult this work has been and continues to be. As a collective, we had consciously removed ourselves from—but had not forgotten—the negative experiences which had served to bend and then mold us. This work brought many of those experiences back to the forefront and caused each of us to work through our often-invisible traumas in a historical era which emphasizes our differences more than any other time in recent history. Accordingly, it was noted by each of the participants how necessary it has become to stand in the gap against the victimization of students.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is evident from this research project that there is a need for more competent Black female educators in exurban schools. Other demographics are underrepresented as well. In the future, there needs to be research that determines the extent that both Black male and Latino educators are needed in exurban elementary classrooms. Currently, Black males are used as disciplinarians far too often when their potential with students is much greater than the extent to which they are utilized. Latino educators are likewise used as liaisons to entire populations for language, social, personal as well as educational needs at their respective sites. These educators have growing numbers of students who share their experiences but do not have their narratives included. Arguably, entire student populations would benefit from the cultural and educational capital greater numbers of these educators could provide.

In this study, it appears that maintaining strong connections to the neighborhoods in which Black educators were raised and lived was instrumental in participants serving those communities. Two of the participants revealed that having a Black female educator early in their lives positively influenced the ways in which they excelled in education. Research which delves into the positive correlation of having a Black female educator during the early formative years upon various groups of public-school students could shed light on the further importance of this educator demographic. Researchers may choose to interview students to determine the extent of that positive correlation.

Further research should continue to center on public-school administrators, leaders, and stakeholders to determine if they are continuously accessing their dispositions, biases, hiring and promotion policies, and decision-making. They need to determine if what they do meshes with what they say they do as indicated by the stated carefully worded goals and mottos which represent their programs. Specifically, the inclusion of more Black women educators and their narratives is necessary. If the goal of schools is indeed to better include even the most ostracized groups of educators and students, the makeup and actions of their faculty and staff along with their curriculum and culture will more inclusively demonstrate their mission.

The phenomenon of high stakes testing must be further examined. Because prior research has indicated a mismatch between educators and students, it can be assumed that the items included in contemporary high stakes tests that are created in large part by these educators are also mismatched to the increasing number of diverse students they are intended to assess.

Finally, the need to continuously address teacher candidates and novice teachers as they enter and progress through their careers demands further exploration. Research exists that points to the need for these educators to understand pedagogy from multiple perspectives. Still, many of the professors, teacher leaders, and administrators directly responsible for the instruction, assessment, and certification of teacher candidates are ill-informed or mis-informed about meeting the needs of diverse student populations. Teacher candidates and novice teachers need—but often do not receive—extended, deep cultural immersion into the schools and communities of the students they are to teach under the direct supervision and leadership of veteran mentors who have positive responses from traditionally marginalized student populations. These teachers also need sustained professional development which encourages them to further develop and then implement principles of social justice education. Research which focuses on these dynamics and how they serve to improve the educational experiences for all students is warranted.

Summary

Chapter 5 provided a summary of the major findings of this research project. These corresponded to the data that was analyzed and then described in Chapter 4 through themes and sub-themes. Thus, implications for transferability, insights and recommendations for future research were detailed.

Providing a minimally researched perspective, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the personal narratives of a small group of Black female educators regarding their experiences of teaching as minority educators in dept including how they

used long-standing communal narratives to frame their perceptions and their pedagogy. The research sites selected for this research represented school districts which paralleled the changing demographics in the larger United States public education system: the teaching force at each school was mainly White and female, the school populations were increasingly diverse, and there were small numbers of educators within the system who are racially, culturally, or ethnically diverse. Each school site was exurban to a larger metropolitan area in Alabama. Participants were chosen based on their identification as Black female elementary educators currently working with diverse students in these exurban schools.

The central question in the research was the following: "How do three Black female educators characterize their personal narratives as they facilitate the needs of diverse students?" The three sub-questions included within this research included the following: (a) How do the descriptions of personal narratives from three elementary educators contribute to their personal identities? (b) How do participants describe the ways in which personal identities affect their perceptions of academic success for their students? and (c) How does each participant's perception of academic success affect their pedagogy?

Four themes and multiple sub-themes were identified through data analysis. These themes included oral narratives, perceptions, actions, and culturally responsive pedagogy. The themes helped to answer the research questions that framed this study. It was concluded that Black female educators facilitate the needs of diverse students by multiple means. Solidifying the long-standing relationship between Black community leaders and the church, the educators in this study identified as spiritual beings bound to the

communities in which they grew up, worked, and lived. They incorporate narratives of success into their practice as they recognized and capitalized upon their students' strengths. Additionally, participants overcame traditional marginalization as they created and cultivated counter narratives of resistance.

These educators dealt with the perceptions of others constantly and consistently. In response to long-standing stereotypes meant to categorize them and to issues of race, gender, intersectionality, monolithic experiences, and invisibility which rendered other educators ineffective in meeting the academic needs of diverse students, participants developed strategies which validated their professionalism, their abilities, and their insight into the needs of greater numbers of students rather than a select group of students. Through their determined actions to include culturally responsive pedagogical practices, participants grew effective as motivators of students so that those students gained the ability to reach levels of academic success desired but not necessarily expected of them. These educators gave students a space to ask questions, to challenge norms, and to be their authentic selves without fear or hesitation.

It is my hope that this study provided a much-needed perspective into the importance of including the voices of Black female educators in exurban public elementary schools. It is hoped that what has been learned about the significant role that Black female educators have played and continue to play in the academic success of all students will be better appreciated and celebrated.

To paraphrase Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009), we need to focus on the actual rather than the perceived condition and needs of our students. Until we do so, we inaccurately label them, blame them, and marginalize them. It is not the failure of the

students that long-standing bias has become and remained embedded within structures through which they are mandated to matriculate. When focusing on the immediate and long-term needs of these diverse student populations, the voices of Black female educators must be included. Much is still to be heard and felt from their collective pedagogy not only for students who look like them but also from those students and communities which differ substantially from them but stand to learn the most from them.

Without the continued lifting of Black female educator voices, our youngest and most vulnerable students stand to lose the most in oppressive systems which were never designed for their success but continuously highlights perceived weaknesses. The danger of such systems is that they present a multitude of obstacles through which students must overcome. The cues received from these systems invite self-loathing for many of our students. The danger into buying into such self-loathing has been detailed by Morrison (2007):

> I knew that some victims of powerful self-loathing turn out to be dangerous, violent, reproducing the enemy who has humiliated them over and over. Others surrender their identity; melt into a structure that delivers the strong persona they lack. Most others, however, grow beyond it. But there are some who collapse, silently, anonymously, with no voice to express or acknowledge it. They are invisible. The death of self-esteem can occur quickly, easily in children, before their ego has "legs," so to speak. Couple the vulnerability of youth with indifferent parents, dismissive adults, and a world, which, in its language, laws, and images, re-enforces despair, and the journey to destruction is sealed. (Foreward, 2007)

Our students are our responsibilities. All of them deserve better than what the collective of us currently offers. Through our intentional actions and words, we can continue the work that has already begun to ensure a brighter future for each of them.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM
Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use

470 Administration Building
701 20th Street South
Birmingham, AL 35294-0104
205.934.3789 | Fax 205.934.1301 |
irb@uab.edu

APPROVAL LETTER

TO: Moore, Monisha F.

FROM: University of Alabama at Birmingham Institutional Review Board
Federalwide Assurance # FWA00005960
IORG Registration # IRB00000196 (IRB 01)
IORG Registration # IRB00000726 (IRB 02)

DATE: 13-Jul-2019

RE: IRB-300003490
Counter-Narratives of Black Female Educators in Exurban Schools

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The IRB reviewed and approved the Initial Application submitted on 26-Jun-2019 for the above referenced project. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Type of Review: Exempt
Exempt Categories: 1
Determination: Exempt
Approval Date: 13-Jul-2019
Approval Period: No Continuing Review

Documents Included in Review:

- phonescript.190702.docx
- surveyquest(journal prompts).190511
- pptletter.190702.docx
- exempt.190703.clean.pdf
- interview.190511.docx

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVED

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

UAB IRB Protocol #300003490
Principal Investigator: Monisha Moore

I am Monisha Moore and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Studies in Diverse Populations program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. I am asking you to participate in a research study titled "Counter-Narratives of Black Female Educators in Exurban Schools." The purpose of this research study is to describe how Black female educators working in exurban schools in Central Alabama characterize their personal narratives as they facilitate the needs of diverse students. Participation in this study is voluntary. Your participation will involve sitting for two, hour-long interviews that I will conduct and audio record. Additionally, you will be asked to keep an electronic journal to reflect your thoughts and experiences at least once weekly for several weeks. I expect 2-5 participants for this study.

You may be inconvenienced with having to spend time participating in the interviews and journal writing. There is a possibility for the potential loss of confidentiality in this study; however, I will take great care to protect your information including using pseudonyms for participant names.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. There will be no penalty if you decide not to be in the study and you are free to withdraw participation at any time. There will be no cost to you for taking part in this study and you will not receive any payment for participation in this study.

If you are willing to participate in this study or if you have any questions about the study, you should contact me at (205) 471-0887 or by e-mail at msmoore56@gmail.com. Once you agree to participate in this study, I will e-mail the interview questions and the journal prompts to you so that you are well aware of the information I seek to obtain. By agreeing to be interviewed, you are consenting to allow your responses to be used in this research.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the UAB Office of the IRB (OIRB) at (205) 934-3789 or toll free at 1-855-860-3789 from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., CT, Monday through Friday.

Sincerely,

Ms. Monisha Moore

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVED PHONE SCRIPT

Phone Script

Principal Investigator: Hello _____. My name is Monisha Moore from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and I am calling you in response to your participation in the research study titled "Counter-Narratives of Black Female Educators in Exurban Schools." To reiterate the information in the letter of invitation, if you participate you will take part in two, hour-long interviews and write in an electronic journal at least once a week. The interview will be scheduled at your convenience. The information that you share is completely confidential. You will be asked about your perceptions and experiences as a Black female educator teaching in an exurban school in Central Alabama. You will not benefit directly from this research; however, I hope that the information you provide may potentially add important perspectives to historical representations and understandings of the Black female experience of teaching in exurban schools. If you are willing to participate in this research study, I will mail you a list of the interview questions and journal prompts in advance so that you are well aware of the information I am seeking. Do you have any questions? Can we schedule a time and place for the initial interview?

APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Name_____

Date: _____

Location_____

Introduction: I want to thank you again for taking time out of your schedule to interview with me. I truly appreciate you being a participant in this research study. I want you to feel free to be open and honest. If you feel uncomfortable answering any question, you may let me know. Information obtained about you for this study will be kept confidential. I will take great care to protect your information. If you want to stop the interview at any time, you may do so.

This interview will be audiotaped so that I can record your responses verbatim during transcription. I may also make notes from time to time. After transcription, I will provide a copy of this interview for you to read in order to ensure that I have captured your experience as an educator as accurately as possible. I do not want to misconstrue anything that you with to express during the interview.

For this interview, I would like to gain a better understanding of you as an individual and as an educator. In order to do that, I will be asking you questions about you, your education, certain events that may have influenced you in the past as well as things that may be influencing you currently. You have had the opportunity to review the interview questions and pose any questions or concerns prior to this interview. As we progress through the interview, I may make notes so that I can ask follow-up questions. Additionally, I may conduct a follow-up interview subsequent to this interview to clarify information. My questions will be open-ended, and you are welcome to clarify any questions that you may not understand. Do you have any questions before we begin? Do you give consent for me to audiotape this interview? Are you ready to begin?

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself (where did you grow up, family, interests, etc.).
2. How long have been employed as an educator?
3. Why did you decide to become an educator?
4. How long have you been employed in your current position?
5. Describe your duties in this position.
6. Tell me about your identity as an individual.

APPENDIX F

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

(JOURNAL PROMPTS)

Journal Prompts

Each week, you will be asked to respond to journal prompts which further determine common themes which may be experienced among the participants in this study. I would like for you to send me your responses by the midpoint of the research (which will be prior to our second interview) and then again at the end of the research timeframe in November. I may use responses from the journal writing in the next interview.

I want you to feel free to be open and honest in your writing. If you feel uncomfortable responding to any of the questions, you may let me know. Information obtained about you for this study will be kept confidential. I will take great care to protect your information in this study.

Journal Prompts:

1. Were there any unique experiences encountered based on your perspective as a Black female educator in an exurban school?
2. Describe the experience. Be sure to include how you perceived the experience and how you think it may have been experienced differently by others.
3. How was this experience connected to other past experiences?
4. How is this experience significant for diverse students?