THIS IS WHY I TEACH! AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ONGOING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN EDUCATORS TEACHING IN URBAN SETTINGS

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I would like to dedicate my dissertation work to my family. The patience and support provided by my parents, Reverend Joseph Glover, Jr., and my mother, Sheryl Diane Glover, was beyond imaginable. I am truly blessed to be your daughter. To my son, Kylan Richburg, thank you for your unconditional love and encouragement. Your very being is my motivation and purpose.

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THIS IS WHY I TEACH! AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ON-GOING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN EDUCATORS TEACHING IN URBAN SETTINGS

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ABSTRACT

Concerns regarding teacher recruitment and teacher retention among African American teachers continue to illustrate the difficulty in diversifying the teacher population. At the same time, African American teachers currently working in urban schools must successfully find strategies to engage urban youth, who face inequitable educational opportunities. Such realities can be challenging to African American teachers, who have also experienced structural oppression, as they are expected to conform to the educational ideologies and strategies of dominant, white society. As such, the personal and professional experiences of African American teachers working within urban schools will not only influence their on-going identity, but will also influence his or her beliefs and teacher pedagogy. To this end, research must be employed that explores how specific experiences, context, and one’s racial/ethnic identity influences the on-going development of African American teacher identity.

This study explored the different experiences of African American teachers; specifically how biographical and professional experiences influenced the ongoing identity development, beliefs, and pedagogy of the African American teacher. To understand the experiences of African American teachers within this study, a narrative approach will be employed. Through narrative methodology, the various ways in which
people context, and history influenced the development of identity, beliefs, and pedagogy are examined.

Findings revealed that participant’s experiences with navigating through oppressive educational institutions, is the material used to counter and disrupt institutional racism in the schools where they now teach. Additionally, participants utilized personal experiences and knowledge of their student’s culture and community, to influence their social and academic development. The identity, pedagogy, and beliefs of participants reflect ongoing development, as they continued to support their students and struggle to change the perceptions of white colleagues and urban students.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Research reveals that the majority of the teaching population is white, middle class women, reflecting a shortage of African American teachers in the field of teaching (Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012; Witty, 1982). Recent literature describes the need to recruit and retain African American teachers, as some scholars argue that all students can benefit from working with teachers who come from diverse backgrounds, who are inviting of unique experiences to the classroom (Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012). Additionally, researchers contend that minority students are more academically successful when they are able to interact with minority teachers or role models, who are able to connect home and school experiences (Moje & Martinez, 2007).

In considering the importance of increasing the population of African American teachers in schools, conversations around teacher preparation and recruitment strategies begin to surface. To engage in such discussions, it is imperative that the process of becoming an African American teacher is explored, as the African American teacher’s experiences can be used as reflective training opportunities. Likewise, an analysis of the life biographies of African American
teachers are essential in understanding how prior schooling experiences has influenced teacher beliefs regarding teaching and learning, and how such beliefs are manifested within one’s teaching pedagogy. Finally, such experiences might reveal why African Americans choose not to become teachers, or chose to leave the profession. To this end, this study will explore the personal and professional experiences of African American teachers to understand how such experiences influences his or her on-going identity development.

**Background and Context**

Given the current state of urban schools, discussions and research surrounding the best approaches to educate disadvantaged youth continues to be the topic of educational reform and debate. The plight of urban schools reflects the concerns surrounding urban communities. Such concerns stem from past policies and historical events that have encouraged discrimination and segregation of minority families, such as denial of citizenship and redlining (Wilson, 2009). The result of specific policies and historical events has created economic and academic gaps between minorities and whites, and has influenced the educational opportunities provided to urban youth.

Indeed, urban schools are faced with more difficult challenges than suburban schools. This reality is evident not only within the policies put in place to support urban schools, but it is also evident in the inequitable educational opportunities disadvantaged youth face. For example, urban classroom settings tend to reflect a high concentration of low-income youth, a large population of underrepresentation students (Batts, 2012), and higher enrollments and behavior concerns, as compared to suburban schools.

Additionally, concerns such as academic achievement, economic stability, family
instability, and various health concerns are also characteristics of urban schools (National Center For Education Statistics, 1996). As the gap between minority students and whites continues to increase, questions surrounding educational equity equality, and access within educational opportunities continue to be prevalent issues in relation to policy development.

Student achievement among disadvantaged youth has also been at the forefront of educational debates and reforms for some time. Critical to understanding the academic challenges of urban schools is the historical lack of equitable educational opportunities afforded to disadvantaged youth, mostly who were minorities living in urban communities. Educational equity eventually became a national priority. For example, President Lyndon Johnson recognized and implemented policy to provide financial resources to disadvantaged students through the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (Thomas & Brady, 2005). Although President Ronald Reagan cut programs to limit federal government involvement in school funding, he and his administrative staff were one of the first to discuss the need for increased academic standards and course requirements, additional time added to school days, and adjustments in how teachers are trained and retained (Thomas & Brady, 2005). In 2001, the Bush administration developed No Child Left Behind, where teacher accountability, increased local control, improved teaching methods, and parental choice began to change teaching and learning experiences (Thomas & Brady, 2005). As a result of No Child Left Behind (2001), teacher quality has become an essential piece in measuring teaching accountability, as teachers are now being held responsible for student performance (Thomas & Brady, 2005).
New changes under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) removed the Highly Qualified Teacher requirements, beginning the 2016-2017 school year (http://www.education.pa.gov/Documents/Teachers-Administrators/Certifications/Frequently%20Asked%20Questions/FAQ-Appropriate%20Certifications%20and%20HQT%20Under%20ESSA.pdf). Although the goal of highly qualified teacher requirements were aligned to teacher certification and licensure, teacher experience, and content knowledge (Doyle & Han, 2012), such changes draw attention to the influence of highly qualified teaching requirements on student achievement. The change in ESSA illustrates that meeting state guidelines does not guarantee student achievement. Instead, it is important to consider other influences, such as teacher effectiveness.

Teacher effectiveness also continues to be a topic of interest among scholars. Owoh (2016) argues, “the aim of an effective teaching technique is for the teacher to understand and interpret the goals and objectives of school curriculum correctly and from it arrange teaching activities that will lead the students to achieve these goals and objectives” (p 120). What Owoh (2016) points out is the need to consider teacher approaches, beliefs, and lesson delivery as being influential in fostering student achievement. Thus, a teacher’s ability to influence student achievement is not solely dependent on their successful meeting of graduation requirements, or even within their depth of content knowledge. The effectiveness of the teacher, specifically how the teacher is able to influence learning and achievement, provides a deeper understanding of how teachers are able to academically grow students.

Teacher effectiveness is not the only indicator that influences student achievement. Other scholars argue the importance of utilizing teaching approaches most
appropriate for teaching minority youth. Stanton-Salazar (2011) suggested that disadvantaged youth would benefit from working with teachers who were empowerment agents, or individuals willing to work with disadvantaged youth in encouraging them to move beyond their current positions. Such teachers are willing to teach against the grain and encourage their students, as well as self, to critically reflect on one’s position in relation to the educational, economical, and societal injustices individuals face. Essential to the relationships between empowerment agents their student is the knowledge that is learned between teachers and students.

Friere’s (2000) pedagogy of the oppressed, where youth are challenged to reflect and act, encouraging a social transformation through authentic learning, is an example of such experiences. He poses a method of teaching that is very different from the traditional approach, where the teacher is the expert who is responsible for depositing knowledge within students. Friere argues that oppressed students must also be seen as experts who bring their own knowledge about their world and experiences. Through problem posing and unpacking one’s world, the student and teacher are able to learn together.

Additionally, Tobin et al. (2014) suggest teachers consider the teaching pedagogy of place, or place-based education, as teachers are mindful of the relevant experiences and the identity their students. This approach of teaching and learning considers the individual in relation to location, culture, and community. However, Gruenewald (2003) argues for a more critical approach in exploring place-based education. He contends that geographical location and contextual settings, as well as and approach that explores the “social, historical, political, and economical contradictions, while considering issues of
race, gender, religion, and class,” is essential to providing authentic learning experiences for oppressed peoples (p. 6). More specifically, this approach reflects the culturally responsive teacher who is able to support student in solving complex problems by tapping into her or his prior knowledge and making connections with subject matter.

Gay (2002) proposes a method of teaching minority students, or culturally responsive teaching, which seeks to utilize the “culture, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). Lee (2007) suggests that teachers embed the Cultural Model Framework within their teaching practices. This approach reflects the culturally responsive teacher who is able to support students in solving complex problems by tapping into their prior knowledge and making connections with subject matter.

In their research of Mexican-American youth, Moje and Martinez (2007) found that supporting academic achievement of Mexican-American youth required supporting the youth in developing his or her self-identity, a sense of belonging among others, and overall support in school. Role models were also imperative to the success of Mexican-American youth in this study, as they were able to support the youth towards post-secondary goals. More specifically, the role models, or cultural brokers, were able to provide youth with social supports within their communities and schools.

Role models who are knowledgeable about student’s home life and who can also help make connections to learning are critical for the achievement of minority youth (Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012). Minority teachers can serve as role models for all types of students, exposing students to different perspectives and cultures. Furthermore, it is imperative that students are able to see more than white teachers in professional
roles, so that they are able to envision minority teachers as being just as capable and professional as whites (Mercer, 1986; Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012). Finally, minority students working with minority teachers may not feel alienated, as they are able to see adults who are similar to them (Cole, 1986; Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012). Such role models may inspire minority students to achieve academically.

Recently, research has been employed around the notion of culturally relevant pedagogy. Extending from the works of Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay (2000), Paris and Alim (2014) content that though culturally relevant pedagogy was able to provide a framework in which to support the achievement of youth, through respecting and considering their heritage and culture, teaching them cultural competence, and guiding them towards becoming critical reflectors and agents within society, such approaches does not promise that the culture or heritage of students remains included within the process of teaching and learning. To this end, Paris and Alim (2014) suggest that researchers and educators turn to culturally sustaining pedagogy, where the goal is to “sustain the linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as a part of the democratic project of schooling and as a needed response to the demographic social change” (p. 88).

Emdin (2011) also extends the notion of culturally relevant pedagogy within research around reality pedagogy. He argues that reality pedagogy is aimed towards fostering the development of student’s consciousness about the various factors that influences their teaching and learning. Additionally, this approach affords the teacher and student to utilize life experiences and stories within the classroom. He describes five steps that students and teachers must actively participate in together, in order to encounter transformative experiences: cogenerative dialogues, coteaching, cosmopolitanism,
context, and content. The details of reality pedagogy, specifically the five steps, will further be explored in chapter two.

As a result of different experiences in communities and cultures, minority teachers are positioned to provide a stance that is different than the dominant norm, providing students with an additional lens in which to analyze (Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012). Although the experiences of minority teachers will vary, the differences by each experience allow students the opportunities to understand how culture, class, and gender may influence perspectives. Through interactions with diverse peoples, minority students are afforded the opportunity to connect their home and schooling experiences (Moje & Martinez, 2007). Moreover, minority teachers may serve as credible sources, as they share lived experiences related to inequalities and inequities they have faced (Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012). Such experiences are meaningful in developing culturally responsive teaching practices (Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012).

Even though researchers contend that minority teachers are influential in the lives of minority students, a shortage of minority teachers continues to exist. Since the mid-1980’s, the shortage of minority teachers has been a topic of concern for many researchers, leaders within the field of education, and invested organizations, as such groups seek to decrease the cultural and racial gap between teachers and students within the United States (Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012). Such concerns reflect the reality of the demographics of teachers in the United States, as the majority of teachers are white, middle class women. As a result, it is possible that teachers hired in urban settings may lack the personal experiences that may support them in working in urban environments (Huisman, Singer, & Catapono, 2010, p. 484).
The limited amount of diversity within the field of teaching leads to what Villegas, Strom, and Lucas (2012) refer to as “an unspoken message that reinforces existing social inequalities” (p. 285). This message makes way for the perception of minorities not being able to hold certain positions of authority in society. To this end, minority youth may not envision themselves as becoming a teacher, or they may not respect the profession of teaching, especially if they are not able to connect with teachers. With the lack of diversity in the field of teaching, it is critical to understand how the academic experiences of African American teachers that has influenced their decisions to become teachers, as well as how experiences within one’s working environment influences their teaching beliefs.

Although all teachers must complete teacher education programs and successfully obtain licensure to teach, the process of becoming a teacher is just as influential as teacher preparation programs. As Lortie (1975) contends, becoming a teacher is a process that begins when teachers were once students, and continues throughout their professional careers (Bukor, 2013; Schempp & Graber, 1992). Additionally, parents, siblings, and friends (Schempp & Gore, 1992) also influence the personal and professional identity of teachers. Through this process of socialization, teachers transfer the “skills and dispositions,” which they believe to be important, upon their students (p. 329). Thus, the beliefs of teachers are related to personal learning experiences, which shape the identity of teachers and teacher beliefs.

Understanding the learning experiences of the African American teachers provides a perspective for exploring the pedagogies of the African American teacher that are influenced by the process of socialization. In this same respect, the experiences of the
African American teachers will also reveal how past experiences are influencing their current professional experiences. Although research describes many different approaches of teaching and learning that are most effective for minority students, it is also critical to explore if the African American teacher has experienced such practices. As noted by Ladson-Billings (2009), “the pedagogical instruction that many teachers of African American students received, leads to intellectual death” (p. 17). Consequently, it is important to understand how the former teachers of African American teachers were able to negotiate their identities, and how this process influenced academic achievement and their teaching approaches.

Statement of the Problem

As public education faces this current era of standards and teacher accountability, concerns regarding teacher recruitment and teacher retention among African American teachers continue to illustrate the difficulty in diversifying the teacher population. Moreover, African American teachers working in urban schools must successfully find strategies to engage urban youth, whose educational opportunities may be inequitable and who may not be able to relate to the school environment. Such realities can be a challenge to African American teachers, who have also experienced oppression, and are forced to find methods for educating disadvantaged youth, who may lack the proper resources to move beyond their current position. As such, African American teachers must find ways to negotiate their identity within an oppressive system of power, where deep and lasting experiences have influenced their views about themselves The experiences of African American teachers working in such environments can lead to African American teachers who exit the profession early, or who may choose to become
more passive in his or her efforts in educating urban youth. To this end, the personal and professional experiences of African American teachers working within urban schools will not only influence their on-going identity, but will also influence their beliefs and teacher pedagogy.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand the on-going development of identity among African American teachers. Additionally, I am interested in exploring how the beliefs and pedagogy of the teacher is influenced by prior and current, personal and professional experiences. As suggested in research, one’s identity is constantly changing, and is heavily influenced by context. As such, this study examined the complex ways in which the identity of African American teachers is developed and activated, and how the experiences of the teacher influences his or her perspectives and approaches in teaching. The research questions for this study is as following:

How do the biographical and professional experiences of African American teachers influence the ongoing development of identity, beliefs, and pedagogy of African American teachers who teach in urban settings?

**Research Approach**

During a time when accountability is at the forefront of policy and educational reform, the influence of change in teaching and learning will impact the personal and professional identity of a teacher. For the African American teacher, policy and reform may create additional conflict and complicate existing struggles to overcome oppression and power within the context of educational institutions. Missing from the research around teacher identity is an understanding of the experiences of black teachers at this
historical moment, and how biographical and professional experiences have shaped their teaching approach. Qualitative methods of research methods of research are well suited for this line of inquiry, as it affords the opportunity to examine the experiences of African American teachers, who may struggle to find self within various contexts, such as hegemonic structured institutions that reflect a strong emphasis on school accountability policies and practices.

Qualitative research is considerate of context allowing the researcher to examine complexities within experiences, phenomena, and interactions. Within qualitative research, the relationship between the researcher and participants provides a space to unpack the multiple experiences that are unique to each individual (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is useful within this study, as it allows for an understanding of particularities, processes, and phenomena that are contextually bound.

This study explored the different experiences of African American teachers, specifically how biographical experiences, context, race/ethnicity, and events influences the ongoing identity development of the African American teacher. Through narrative methodology, I planned to examine the biological stories of African American teachers. As explained in the works of McNiff (2007), by exploring the stories of educators, researchers and participants can begin to challenge the oppressive power of dominant stories that persistently shape what is considered normal and accepted. Moreover, attention to the experiences of teachers have been at the forefront of research, as recent research has recognized the importance of the narratives of teachers’ lives and experiences, specifically in understanding the role of the teacher within the development of curriculum and pedagogy (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007).
Creswell (2013) contends that narrative research as a method includes an account of an event, action, or chronologically connected series of events or actions, that can be oral or written. Within narrative research, the differences by perspectives can be explored, revealing the various ways in which experiences, context, and interactions influences the stories of the researched. As a result, I was able to explore the complexities within individual experiences.

**Rationale and Significance**

The stories of the African American teachers within this study might serve as an additional perspective in understanding how African American youth are socialized into society, how educational experiences influence African American youth and their future decisions, and how past academic experiences and present working experiences influences the teaching beliefs of the African American teacher. The findings of this study may provide insight surrounding teacher preparation and teacher recruitment of minority teachers. Moreover, the study may reveal patterns of social reproduction embedded within the fabrics of social institutions, which discourage African American youth from becoming teachers.

The findings might also inform teacher preparation programs of the impact of learning and socialization experiences on teacher identity and beliefs, and how policy may or may not be inviting to the different pedagogical approaches that are beneficial to urban students. Furthermore, findings might reveal the need for renewed approaches to recruit African American teachers, as well as the importance of including the narratives of more diverse experiences within teacher identity research. Thus the experiences of the African American teachers, who have demonstrated academic success, might provide
current and future teachers with insight on successful approaches for working with urban students.

**Definition of Term**

To provide a frame in which to analyze context and racial/ethnic identity within this study, this section will explore how specific concepts will be defined. Additionally, this section is also designed to offer clarity regarding concepts that are defined in various ways within research.

Urban settings- school districts demonstrating a combination of the following: higher enrollments (on average) than rural or suburban schools, limited resources for teachers and students, classroom behavior concerns, high drop out rates, low academic achievement, economic instability, and various health and safety risks, issues related to a lack of instructional consistency, inexperienced staff or teachers, and low expectations of students (Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, & Noguera, 2015; National Center For Education Statistics, 1996).

Similar to the different ways in which urban settings are defined, research continues to illustrate the complexities around racial identity of African Americans. As such, researchers and scholars use the term Black and African American differently and interchangeably. To this end, the use of the terms Black and African American, when cited, will reflect the decisions of the researchers, which may or may not be used interchangeably.

For this study, I turn to a discussion by Jackson (2001), specifically in his process of understanding racial and ethnic identity development. He contends that his initial definition of Blacks described Blacks as members of a racial group, sharing similar cultural and physical characteristics, having African heritage, which includes the ancestors of slaves. However, a renewed understanding of race and ethnicity led Jackson (2001) to refer to Blacks as African Americans. He argues that as Blacks began to
explore their racial identity, new socially constructed labels such as Afro-American and African-American began to surface. His new premise suggest that African American describes a subgroup of Black people, which he argues is not the same as being Jamaican or Nigerian, but refers to the ancestors of slaves in America.

Similar to Jackson, I have chosen to use African American to describe such minorities who are a subgroup of Black people, and are the ancestors of slaves in America. My decision to use African American to describe this population is aligned to the Jackson’s (2001) personal learning regarding the process of racial identity and ethnic identity experienced by African Americans as a result of historical, political, and economical influences.

The next chapter explores literature related to identity development and racial and ethnic identity. Various researchers and models will be examined to understand the ways in which identity develops, and the influences that speak to one’s racial and ethnic identity. Literature specific to the racial identity development of African Americans will also be discussed, to further understand the influence of race on teacher identity. Finally, teacher identity will also be examined, along with the strategies that are beneficial to the social and academic development of urban youth, as urban settings reflect the professional context of participants.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Identity Development

With various ways of defining and exploring identity and identity development, research has demonstrated the complexities in unpacking the factors that influence who one is and is becoming (Sokol, 2009). Additionally, the conceptualization of identity is determined by the perspectives and the lens of the researcher, specifically the approach utilized for a study (Erikson, 1968; Freud, 1900; Mead, 1934; Turner, 2002). As the focus of research varies, so might the different ways of understanding identity, especially in relation to context, experiences, and theoretical foundations.

Erikson (1968) takes a psychological and social perspective in exploring identity, which provides a developmental basis in understanding identity. He argues that as children progress through different developmental stages, the different context and experiences, as well as how one’s group responds to the child, allows the child to understand and establish one’s identity. Erikson (1968) is very specific in clarifying the
differences between personal identity and ego identity. Personal identity refers to recognition of continuity of identity, in relation to time, space, and the acknowledgement of one’s identity from others. Ego identity reflects the quality of one’s identity according to personal awareness, as well as the perception of others. He argues that it is during one’s adolescence years that one begins to form an ego identity. To understand the influences contributing to ego identity development, Erikson (1968) argues the importance of understanding one’s childrearing experiences and the historical context of lived experiences.

Ego identity is also understood as a feeling of knowing one’s destination (Erikson, 1968). Such thoughts reflect a developmental process, where questions about one’s future begin to surface. Erikson argues that this stage begins during adolescence, where the youth is mentally mature, and has experienced physiological growth and social responsibility (p. 91). Adolescents experience growth as a result of encounters or crisis. As a result of a crisis, the adolescent is able to move forward towards a new course of journey (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003). However, as the adolescent looks for a continued idea of identity, he or she must be mindful of both what was learned from his or her family, as well as the implications of society (p. 128).

The idea of becoming and the beginning of forming one’s ego identity occurs during adolescents, as a result of what Erikson (1968) refers to as exploration and commitment. As adolescents face increased autonomy, hormonal and physical changes, as well as an increase in social interactions outside of the family, identity-formation begins (Erikson, 1968; Sokol, 2009; Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003). Erikson (1968) refers to this process as the “Identity vs. Role Confusion” stage, where the adolescent is
actively merging earlier identities to new ones that are exclusive to the adolescent (Erikson, 1968; Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003).

Erikson (1968) asserts that the community and community members play a key role in identity development. He contends that if the image or imagination of who and what the adolescent wants to become is prominent during development, he or she will place trust into individuals or peers that are supportive of the goals of their imagination (p. 129). As such, Marcia (1966) suggests that such ideologies are necessary for the growing ego of the adolescence, as he or she begins to synthesize their past, present, and future. During this period, the adolescent must consider the ideologies of society and how his or her identity aligns to his or her ideologies (p. 132).

Although Erikson (1968) was a pioneer in understanding identity, many researchers and theorists have also added different ways of understanding identity. For example, Oyserman, Elmore, and Smith (2012) define identity as “the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is” (p. 69), which are composed of individual’s past and present experiences, as well as future aspirations. Therefore, one’s identity is a reflection of one’s self concept, imagining “who one is, was, and will become” (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012, p. 72).

Styker and Burke (2000) argues that identity reflects the multiple meanings and roles that a person assumes within societies and networks of relationships. Gee (2000) describes the various ways in which identity has been defined, and refers to identity as the “kind of person” in a specific context, influenced by historical, institutional, and structural forces (p. 99). He also acknowledges the complexities of identity, stating that
individuals have multiple identities, which are contingent upon time and place, influenced by interactions from moment to moment, and are also “ambiguous” (p. 99).

Within the Gee’s (2000) research, identity is a social construct, signifying identity as forces in which we have no control, such as “genes” (p. 101). Additionally, identity is described as being “authorized” by powers within institutions, such as a position one holds (teacher educator) at work, influenced by discourse, and can be based upon group affiliation.

Sokol’s (2009) research on identity development suggests that identity is forever evolving, and offers a description of this process. Within identification (ages six through eleven), the child is able to develop his or her own goals regarding future aspirations, moving away from expectations already established by parents. Identity formation (ages twelve through twenty-four) in adolescence consists of the adolescent trying to resolve questions about one’s purpose, leaving the adolescence in a state of loss and confusion. Identity development within adulthood (ages twenty-five and up) describes how different life events or changes in one’s life as adult influences one’s identity. Sokol (2009) suggest that examination and evaluation are essential to this process, specifically during middle adulthood, as the adult continues to consider and reconsider decisions that have effected them in the past, and that are meaningful to them for the future.

Marcia (1966) expands on Erikson’s psychosocial theory of identity development into a theory he coins as identity status. The theory describes several identity statuses that adolescents commit to as a result of an identity crisis. Within this process of commitment, the adolescent is actively choosing occupations and beliefs (p. 119).
As the adolescent begins to explore occupations and beliefs, he or she aligns to one of four identity statuses. Identity foreclosure represents an adolescent who has not experienced a crisis, but commits to values and beliefs learned from parents (Marcia, 1966). Identity diffusion describes the adolescent that may or may not have had a crisis, but demonstrates limited commitments or decisions regarding one’s occupation (Marcia, 1966). Identity moratorium reflects the adolescent who has experienced a crisis but have no clear commitments, and identity achievement refers to the adolescent that has had a crisis and has committed to an occupation and ideologies (1966b). As noted in Sokol’s (2009) criticism of Erikson’s psychosocial identity theory, Marcia’s (1966a, 1966b) research does not reflect the influence of historical evolution, such as changes in occupational training and changes that may influence the occupational ideologies and commitments of adolescents of the twenty-first century.

Sneed, Schwartz, & Cross (2006) also explores identity status theory, specifically the perspective and influence of non-White populations. The researchers point out the importance of understanding the role of ethnicity within identity development, and concludes that an integrated racial and ethnic model of identity development, one which considers the role of ethnicity within identity development, might reveal cultural differences not evident within mainstream theories and research. Also important to one’s identity development is the “content” of meaning making, as “religion, social class, occupational status, gender/sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, or culture” influences identity (Sneed, Schwartz, & Cross, 2006, p. 77).

Research has also been explored surrounding the influence of interactions on the development of self. Self has been researched utilizing sociological perspectives, such
as symbolic interactionism. For example, Mead (1934), argues that self is influenced by society, reactions of others, confirmations of self from others, and interpretations; Freud (1900), recognizes how interactions and interpretations reflect an emotional process, and can influence one’s perception, reaction, and identity; and Goffman (1961), describes the importance of the encounter—which is woven into units of structural and cultural meanings, and found within social gatherings. Encounters guide the rules of how different contexts are defined among individuals, the roles assumed, and the discourse or emotions used. Turner (2002) states that encounters are used to help individuals assess situations, allowing the individual to understand how to present self (p. 23). The experiences within encounters allow individuals to interact with others and interpret the roles, rituals, discourse, and emotions in which to use (Turner, 2002).

Anderson and Metheny (2004) suggest that self is developed through interactions and interpretations between society and the mind, and Cinoğlu and Arikan (2012) stresses the importance of self-concept, which reflects the assemblage of meanings and interpretations that we assign ourselves as a result of personal judgments. Self-concept is where self understands the difference between what it represents and the standards of society (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012). Such perceptions can be viewed positively or negatively, and influences identity formation.

Turner (2002) argues that self is “always emotional,” and one’s perception of self does not occur without emotion (p. 101). To this end, encounters perceived as positive consist of five requirements: (1) verification of self, (2) profitable exchange payoffs, (3) group inclusion, (4) trust, and (5) facticity. Turner (2002) states that needs for
individuals may vary by situation, but he also argues that those mentioned above, (which he coins as transactional forces), cut across all situations.

*Profitable exchange payoffs* describe how humans evaluate situations to see a personal pay off or reward in exchange for their investment. *Group inclusion* explains how humans assess situations for signals from others to confirm their inclusion within group interactions. *Trust* is illustrated as a result of an evaluation of a situation that demonstrates predictability, sincerity, and respect among the group. *Facticity* can be understood through indicators such as a common world between self and others, and consistency between what the actual situation and what the situation is supposed to be (p. 100).

Three levels represent the verification of self, which is driven by emotions and thoughts that derive from what people think about themselves and what responses they believe they deserve from others. These levels are: core self, sub-identities, and role identities (Turner, 2000). The core self represents the thoughts and feelings that a person has about him or her-self. Sub-identities reflect the feelings that are connected to institutional spheres—such as education or religious entities, and role identities describe self in regards to roles. Although confirmation of each identity need is important, the core identity is most critical, as it is within this level that the majority of emotions regarding self and others are most powerful (p. 101).

According to Oyserman & Markus (1990), one’s possible self and reference groups also influence the development of identity among adolescent. Thus, social identity, or connections with families or communities influences the goals of each individual. (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006; Oyserman, Gant, and Ager, 1995).
African American adolescents; however, must negotiate their identities, as they balance future, possible selves (Oyserman, Gant, and Ager, 1995). During this process, the African American youth must consider the negative stereotypes as well as the positive goals essential to his or her identity. As such, one’s possible self, or the self to be “approached, avoided, or even feared,” may contradict the traditions and goals of one’s family, one’s culture, or one’s community (Oyserman & Markus, 1990, p. 113).

Research surrounding self, specifically the influence of interactions and the perceptions of others (Anderson & Metheny, 2004; Cinoğlu & Arikan, 2012; Freud, 1923; Goffman, 1961; Mead, 1934; and Turner, 2002), provides a lens in which to understand how African American teachers are influenced by family, schooling experiences, culture, and community activities, as well as how current institutional spheres influence who the African American teacher is becoming personally and professionally. Additionally, Turner’s (2002) research on the verification of self and possible selves (Oyserman & Markus, 1990), illustrates how African American teachers are able to successfully meet the academic requirements of becoming teachers, as well as how family, schooling experiences, institutional spheres and roles influence their perception of who they are. Moreover, research on the verification of self allows for a more focused understanding of how the personal experiences, as well as professional experiences and contexts not only influences the identity of the African American teacher, but also how he or she interacts and responds with individuals within different context in which they exist.

The importance of context for identity development is highlighted in the works of Bronfenbrenner (1977), Darling (2007), and Neal and Neal (2013). Bronfenbrenner’s
work explores the interrelationships between various context and human development. He argues that social and historical context are connected to one’s development, and within the ecological system, one can see relationships within systems and across systems. The active individual at the center of the circles is constantly influenced by their experiences within the various contexts, and responds to the context in a unique way. Knowledge constructed by an individual is a result of his or her experiences, and is exclusive to that individual. By examining development from an ecological perspective, Bronfenbrenner considers the experiences of the child at the center of concentric circles, which reflect different systems: Microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems.

The ecological systems theory (EST) (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Neal & Neal, 2013) affords the opportunity to understand how the developing African American teacher was (and continues to be) influenced by various contexts and factors. The EST model developed by Bronfenbrenner is graphically organized as being nested within one another. However, Neal and Neal (2013) argues that the systems should be theorized as “networked,” as each system is described according to the social relationships of the person in the center, and there is an overlapping relationship between systems on different levels.

Neal and Neal (2007) emphasize the importance of social interactions. They define settings as “sets of interacting people” and note that “the ecological environment is an overlapping arrangement of structures, each directly or indirectly connected to the others by the direct and indirect social interactions of their participants” (p. 727). The researchers conclude that the consideration of this definition reveals that systems are not
essentially nested within each other, and “that it is individuals’ patterns of social interactions with one another that determine how systems relate to one another” (p. 727).

Within Neal and Neal’s (2013) networked model of ecological systems, each system is defined similar to Bronfenbrenner’s EST. The microsystem is referred to as a setting, or individuals actively participating through interactions with the centered person. The mesosystem, or “ipso facto,” is described as a social interaction that occurs between participants from different settings and also includes the centered person. The “ipso facto” represents a overlap between two microsystems as a result of social interactions (p. 728). The exosystem is also a setting where groups of people participate in social interactions “that does not include, but whose participants interact directly or indirectly with, the focal individual” (p. 728).

Neal and Neal (2013) also discuss “forces” that mold the patterns of social interactions that define settings (729). Although the forces are not graphically represented in their model, Neal and Neal (2013) contends that forces, such as “legal, political, and cultural systems,” can influence the structure of social networks, the systems surrounding the central individual, and more importantly, how the individual interacts with others, and within his or her networks (p. 729).

It is important to note that in considering the influence of context, the ways in which various levels of context—such as micro and macro levels, influences the identity of African American teachers is also worth discussing (Darling, 2007; Neal & Neal, 2013). An examination of systems, specifically the roles and procedures that govern each system, affords a clearer understanding of how social interactions within different systems govern the roles and actions of the African American teacher.
In any event, the African American teacher’s process of identity development is one that is influenced by feelings and thoughts of self, roles and categories assigned by society, and interactions with one’s context and others. As such, I turn to research on identity theory and social identity theory, as both theories provide a space to unpack the individual and collective experiences of African American teachers. More specifically, how those experiences influence African American teachers personally, and as a group.

**Identity Theory**

Social interaction and social networks provide individuals with the opportunities to interpret the behaviors that are connected to the roles within a specific context. Thus, individuals are able to use experiences within different encounters to understand which identity he or she will become. Identities are hierarchically organized, and reflect the commitment of the individual to the identity, and the likelihood that a specific identity will be activated (Anderson & Matheny, 2004; Hogg, White, & Terry, 1995; Stryker & Burke, 2000). The number of social relationships associated with a specific role will also influence the likelihood that an identity is activated. Once an identity is activated, self-verification has occurred (Stets & Burke, 2003). Here, the individual manages their behavior so that it is consistent with the role.

Stets and Burke (2003) contends that identity theory considers the role of self, particularly the meaning and expectations of the role at the time that it is occupied by self. The expectations or standards that encompasses the role embedded within society, may also govern the behavior of the individual (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012).
Social Identity Theory

The self in social identity theory is able to reflect on self and “classify or categorize self as an object” (Stets & Burke, 2003). An individual’s social identity occurs as a result of the self-acknowledgment that he or she belongs to a group. Such groups may be referred to as social groups, as they share similar social identities and identity with each other (Stets & Burke, 2003).

Two processes that are essential within social identity theory are self-categorization and social comparison. Each produces two different consequences, as comparisons between self and in-group and out-group similarities or differences influences how self accepts identity. Self-categorization accounts for the aspect of identity related to one’s attitudes, values, or beliefs, as well as what is accepted as a norm, discourse, or other important intergroup classifications (Stets & Burke, 2000). Social comparison reflects the “enhancing outcomes” of self, such as feelings that are developed through a personal assessment of self, compared to in-group and out-group members, which can be perceived by self as being negative or positive.

Individuals may also experience what Hogg, White, and Terry (1995) describes as depersonalization. Depersonalization is described as the “contextual change in the level of identity, not a loss of identity” (p. 261). This process involves the individual giving up their individual identity and becoming a group member. Additionally, the individual is able to self-categorize, which allows for self-perception and behavior to align with group members and group behavior. Ultimately, depersonalization links salience as a “connection and catalyst of change” (p, 20).
Identity salience within social identity theory depends on “fit” (Stets & Burke, 2003, p. 230) or social comparison (Anderson & Matheny, 2012). Fit is defined as “the congruence between the stored category specifications and perceptions of the situation” (p. 230). A social category is considered as “fit” when the individual believes that the characteristics of the category he or she may possess, are the same as those held by the group. Salience within social identity theory is based upon the situation, as well as the level of identity that is aligned to the importance of the situation.

Awareness of one’s ethnic identity is critical to social group identity. The ethnic identity assumed by the African American teacher will influence the identity that becomes salient as work, as well as selection or placement within different groups. As noted by Kenny and Briner (2013), increased awareness of one’s ethnic identity occurs in two ways: ethnic assignation and ethnic identification. Ethnic identification describes a “pull” into, or when the individual “recognizes similarity or relevance to one’s ethnicity” (Kenny & Briner, 2013, p. 731). Ethnic assignation—or the push into an ethnic identity, depends on: “potential triggers, reasons for ethnic identity salience increase, criteria, the emotion aroused, and workplace consequence” (Kenny & Briner, 2013, p. 732).

The influence of one’s ethnicity is critical in understanding how ethnicity and personal experiences influences the identity of the African American teacher, as well as how different roles and group memberships, within and outside of the workplace, will continue to influence who the African American teacher is becoming.

**Racial/Ethnic Identity Development**

Erikson (1968) thoroughly explores the process of identity development, while also acknowledging the importance of race within the unification of self among
minorities. He argues that both oppression and context in which the minority (Blacks) exist influences the positive or negative images he or she may hold of self. As such, Blacks are in search of an identity, as they are “in some ways voiceless,” struggling against the stereotypes and assumptions of society (p. 297).

This process of identity development among Negroes reflects periods of “alienation” within a journey of “historical evolution.” According to Erikson, the development of one’s racial identity for Negroes is marked by two different kinds of time: the developmental stage and a period of history (p. 309). To this end, the crisis of the Black youth reflects the current issues of society, as well as the historical and cultural context of society. Such factors influence the identity and ideologies of the Black youth.

Identity is complex and is influenced by one’s family, history, social and political environments, and individual characteristics (Tatum, 1997), as well as one’s age, social class, gender, sexual orientation, cognitive and physical ability, and religion (Collins, 1989). Likewise, the development of an ethnic or racial identity, which begins during adolescence, reflects a complex, lifelong process, where the individual bridges one’s past, present, and future into an interrelated sense of self (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966; Phinney, 1989; and Tatum, 1997).

Research illustrates the complexities involved in understanding how ethnicity and race influence one’s identity. Much of the confusion in unpacking the influence of ethnicity and race originates from the lack of consistency in defining race and ethnicity, as ethnicity is often associated with geographic location, and racial identity is related to an oppressive struggle (Adams, 2001; Helms, 1996). Nevertheless, various researchers and theorists attempt to synthesize the many components and factors that reflect a

Different researchers and theorists have developed ethnic and racial identity developmental models to conceptualize the process of identity for minorities. The difficulties in defining ethnicity and race reflect the different approaches and perspectives within research studies or models, such as those of social psychologists, counselors, educators, and anthropologists (Jackson, 2001; Cross, 1971; Parham, 1989; and Quintana, 2007).

Chavez and Guido (1999) argue that racial and ethnic identities are complex constructs, developed within self as a result of “social and cultural influences” (p. 39). As such, the researchers assert that racial identity goes beyond the color of one’s skin, and has effects on how one is treated (Chavez & Guido, 1999). Helms (1990) adds that racial identity development is also a result of elements, such as parental and family influence. Ethnic identity, however, “is the degree to which individuals perceive themselves included and aligned with an ethnic group” (Smith & Sylva, 2011), and consists of an individual’s movement toward a highly conscious identification with their own cultural values, behaviors, beliefs, and traditions” (Chavez & Guido, 1999, p. 41).

Adams (2001) argues that race, ethnicity, and racial and ethnic identity have been used interchangeably. Phinney (1989) adds that race can be defined through the concept of “superiority or inferiority and has been used to justify unequal educational and
occupational opportunities, as well as segregated residential communities and public spaces” (p. 211), while ethnicity reflects one’s culture, which is influenced by history, social status, occupation, and personality or beliefs.

Jackson (2001) concludes that the changes that have occurred over time illustrate how ethnicity was initially used to differentiate between whites and minority groups. As such, his initial stance for his Black identity model was established on the principle of blacks as members of a racial group, sharing similar cultural and physical characteristics. This definition refers to Blacks as those having African heritage, including the ancestors of slaves. However, Jackson (2001) describes how his understanding of race and ethnicity has changed, and discusses this change within his updated Black Identity Model (BID), or the African American Identity Development (AAID). Jackson (2001) asserts that as Blacks began to explore their racial identity, new socially constructed labels such as Afro-American and African-American began to surface. His new premise suggest that African American describes a subgroup of Black people, which he argues is not the same as being Jamaican or Nigerian, but refers to the ancestors of slaves in America.

Over time, researchers have also begun to question the process of ethnic and racial identity development. In fact, Quintana, Castañeda-English, and Ybarra (1999) argue that research should examine the development of ethnic identity during childhood and adolescents, as many adolescent are faced with changes in cognitive ability, an increase in interactions, an increased awareness of one’s appearance and social life, and an awareness of one’s ethnicity and race. Such experiences and encounters will manifest differently within the individual experiences of the adolescent, demonstrating that the process of ethnic identity development is not only different for each individual, but that it
is a process that does not necessarily occur in a linear stage. To this end, it is necessary to understand the identity development of the African American teacher from a perspective that is supportive of his or her experiences as adolescents, influenced by oppressive social institutions, historical evolutions (Erikson, 1968), and various context. Such perspectives may be more understood through a lens grounded in ethnic or racial identity models, during the adolescent period.

**Adolescent ethnic identity models.** Essential to the development of one’s ethnic identity, is an understanding of the core of the individual, as this is the place where perceptions of self, of others, and group assignment, such as one’s class, nationality, and culture exist (Erikson, 1968; Turner, 2002). Achievement of one’s ethnic identity occurs as a result of exploring what it means to be a minority in a majority white dominant society, a process that Phinney (1988) argues as being useful for understanding the ethnic identity development among adolescents.

Phinney’s (1988) integrated identity model consists of four stages. The first is the pre-encounter or conformity stage, where minorities are unconsciously accepting of the values and traditions of the dominant white majority. As a result of an encounter (concern or issue), the minority moves towards the encounter or crisis stage, as he or she is forced to reflect on how racism influences who they are, as well as the perception that society holds regarding their ethnic group. Immersion or moratorium occurs after a period of exploration by the minority, as he or she begins to learn more about their culture and heritage, and compares his or her culture to that of the dominant majority. Internalization or identity achievement has taken place when the minority has been able to resolve questions regarding their own ethnic futures. As such, the minority’s
commitment will influence the action he or she will take (Marcia, 1980). Lastly, Phinney (1988) describes generativity as the stage where the minority possesses a confirmed ethnic identity. Such minorities are not only concerned about their own ethnic identities, but they are also concerned with others who also encounter oppression.

Tatum (1997) also offers an approach in understanding identity development in adolescence. The quest for identity among adolescence includes several aspects, such as one’s occupational plans, religious understandings and beliefs, political influences, ethnic identities, and one’s perception of gender roles (p. 53). Tatum (1997) also asserts the importance of parental influence during the development of ethnic identity. She claims that the self-perceptions of African American youth are a result of the messages and racial content received from others, such as parents or teachers. Such messages or encounters are influential to the development of identity among the African American adolescent.

**Adult black racial identity models.** Several models have been developed or revised that describes the development of Black identity. Helms (1984, 1990) provided modifications to the Cross’s Nigrescence Model of Black identity development (Cross, 1971) that added a worldview perspective of people and institutions, as well as the consideration of dimensions within several stages of the model. Jackson (1975) offered a model consisting of four stages, which describes a journey of acceptance and rejection of White standards, the development of Black identity and culture, the isolation away from whites, and the adoption of overall positive elements of American society. His model has since been revised (Jackson, 2001).
Although the Nigrescence Model of Black identity is the basis of various racial and ethnic identity models (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Helms, 1990; Jackson, 1975, 2001; Parham, 1989; Phinney, 1988), the development of the model reflects the historical events—such as desegregation and the Civil Rights Era, which have heavily influenced the process of “becoming black” for African Americans during that time period (Adams, 2001; Jackson, 2001; Parham, 1989). Within past Black identity models, the “process of becoming black,” occurs during adulthood (Cross, 1971: Jackson, 1975; Parham, 1989), however other researchers argue that ethnic identity development occurs during adolescents (Erikson, 1968; Phinney, 1989; Tatum, 1997).

As a result of the societal influences occurring during the civil rights era, many counselors, psychologists, and educators were challenged with understanding how the historical events influenced African Americans psychologically (Adams, 2001; Cross & Fhagen, 2001; Jackson, 2001; Parham & Helms, 1986). Although it is argued that Blacks do not face similar “social, environmental, and personal factors” and that the stages within the model should be considered as a more developmental process, it is imperative to understand the development of the model.

Cross’s model describes a five step process in which Blacks within the United States move along a path of having a White frame of reference, to developing a positive Black frame of reference (Cross, 1971, 1991, and 1995; Sue & Sue, 2008). The first stage, the pre-encounter stage describes the African-American whom hates his or her blackness, preferring to embrace White values and ways (Cross, 1971, 1991, and 1995). Immersion-emersion occurs when the individual removes him or herself from the dominant culture and chooses to immerse into Black culture, while also internalizing a

Changes to this model also include two additional dimensions of the pre-encounter stage, assimilation and anti-black (Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, Cokley, Cross, and Worrell (2001). The pre-encounter assimilation stage reflects individuals with a “low salience for race but strong reference group orientation centered on being an American” (p. 176). The anti-black identity describes the original pre-encounter perspective of negative attitudes towards blacks, or black self-hatred. The immersion phase also added two dimensions: intense Black involvement and anti-White (Vandiver et al, 2001). Persons identifying with the intense Black involvement dimension become committed to Blackness and journeying towards Black identity (Vandiver et al, 2001). Members falling into the dimension of anti-White attitudes are those individuals who have fully immersed into Blackness, and demonstrate an open expression of disapproval of Whites, as a result of oppression (Vandiver et al, 2001). For the last two stages, internalization and internalization-commitment stages, the revised model merges the two stages, and coined as the stage of internalization. This stage now reflects the embracing of diversity among different cultural groups, and the “uncoupling” of the link between self-acceptance and mental health. The researchers argue that the embracement of Blackness does not imply a positive transformation in thinking (Vandiver et. al, 2001). Additionally, the last stage demonstrates the levels of race salience through three type of identities (Sue & Sue, 2008): Black nationalism, or Black empowerment (Vandiver et. al,
2001); biculturalist, or a sense of Blackness merged with a sense of being American (Sue & Sue, 2008), and multiculturalist, or “multiple identity formation” (Sue & Sue, 2008, p. 238).

Parham’s (1989) extension of the Cross’s model of psychological nigrescence provides a platform in which to analyze African American teachers’ identity. He explores how the different developmental stages, life experiences, and task associated with developmental stages of African Americans, influences how African Americans cycle through the process of Black identity. Parham (1989) defines recycling as, “the reinitiation of the racial identity struggle and resolution process after having gone through the identity development process at an earlier stage in one’s life” (p. 213). This explanation of recycling explains how new experiences at different points in one’s life can initiate confusion, thus triggering the process of recycling back through the stages. Parham describes three different levels within the model of nigrescence: late adolescence/early adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood.

The notion of recycling provides a framework for understanding the complexities within African American racial identity development, specifically during adulthood. Furthermore, Parham’s (1989) discussion of the different levels within this model provides a lens in unpacking how various stages of life and experiences within the career of African American teachers, can influence the development of African American teacher identity and teacher pedagogy.

For African American teachers, the process of recycling begins during late adolescence/early adulthood. This period is defined by the involvement of the African American teachers within clubs or organizations that either demonstrates “activism,
Blackness, or lack of it” (Parham, 1989, p. 197). Within this stage, African American teachers face a complex reality that is influenced by “values systems, world-views, and historical legacies” (Parham, 1989, p. 199).

Within the pre-counter stage, the African American teacher is often associated with organizations or groups with limited ethnic persons, as they attempt to assimilate into the dominate culture. The encounter stage reflects a period of confusion, as an event or moment changes the African American teacher’s perspective regarding integration and assimilation. During the immersion-emersion stage, the African American teacher takes on a Black frame of reference, as he or she begins to develop feelings of anger towards Whites and positivity towards Black achievement may also begin to resonate. Internalization within this level reflects the African American teacher who has developed a more secure inner perspective of self and others from different ethnic groups. Here, concerns regarding oppression of different groups or the ability to code-switch become more obvious.

Continuation to the next level within Parham’s (1989) cycle of psychological nigrescence is the stage of middle adulthood. For Parham (1989), middle adulthood reflects a time of physical and mental transformation. As bodies and minds begin to mature, Parham (1989) argues that adults within this stage begin to align their standard of living to their careers; as well as to the goals they have for their children or elderly parents. To this end, African Americans teachers within this stage become more connected to social institutions, such as being more involved within his or her workplace. Essential to this stage is reflection of past decisions, as African Americans begin to question where they are in life. The interpretation of reality of Blacks collectively, will
vary from whites. Individual perceptions will also vary and depend on previous life experiences, or one’s ability to assimilate into white culture. Additionally, the social institutions that one is associated with—such as schools, will also influence the attitudes and behaviors of African American teachers.

The pre-encounter stage during middle adulthood reflects African American teachers who may attribute his or her success to work ethic or talent, but may also understand that success depends on the level of acceptance of the dominant, white culture (Parham, 1989). During the stage of encounter (middle adulthood level), the African American teacher may experience different levels of “emotional intensities,” as he or she must remind self that he or she is black (Parham, 1989, p. 204). Although the African American teacher may hold a certain status that is related to income, the African American teacher may also find him or herself experiencing encounters that will cause them to perceive outcomes as a result of racial differences—or not being white (Parham, 1989).

The immersion-emersion stage during the middle adulthood period reflects efforts to show a stronger sense of Black pride. As such, African Americans involved in educational institutions are more likely to promote culturally relevant teaching methods for students (Parham, 1989). Parham also suggest the conflict that African Americans may face as a result of biculturalness, where they must maintain a “socially appropriate” reflection of self that is accepted by whites, but also acknowledges one’s Blackness. Internalization during this level describes the African American teacher who is more secure with his or her sense of Blackness, as they are able to reevaluate their relationships with individuals from diverse ethnic groups (Parham, 1989).
In late adulthood, Parham (1989) African Americans teachers have reached a place in life where interaction among social institutions is common, but the type of interaction depends on one’s racial identity. Additionally, reflection and appreciation of past experiences become prevalent.

The pre-encounter stage during late adulthood describes African American teachers who may compare their success to their White counterparts. Likewise, they may attribute success or failure to work ethic, believing at times that other African Americans can be successful if he or she worked hard (Parham, 1989). The encounter stage during late adulthood represents an emotional journey, as the African American teacher may be closer to retirement. Reflection may consist of positive or negative experiences, while the African American teacher may question past decisions. The immersion-emersion period is marked by “intense” emotions (Parham, 1989, p. 209). African American teachers in this stage may feel emotions related to disappointment of self if they believe that they have not included a sense of Blackness within their life. As such, emphasis regarding Black studies, culturally relevant teaching, or approaches utilizing social justice concepts may be implemented within one’s teaching strategies, or understood through one’s teaching beliefs.

Similar to the satisfaction experienced during the internalization stage of middle adulthood, African American teachers at the internalization stage of late adulthood also experiences a sense of contentment, as he or she may feel satisfied with one’s identity (Parham, 1989). As they age towards retirements, there are some possible efforts of trying to influence the lives of oppressed people at work, by investing their time
supporting other teachers, students, and parents in discovering strategies or teaching and learning methods that work to empower generations following.

Parham (1989) contends that identity resolution is possible when the individual progresses to the Internalization stage. Within this stage, the individual may hold one set of attitudes and a minimum of two different dimensions. The first dimension, ethnocentric, defines the African American teacher with a strong sense of Black pride. Humanistic, describes the African American teacher who is more concerned with being open and flexible in developing relationships with whites, as race becomes less of an issue for them. African American teachers may perceive a connection between self and oppressed peoples, regardless of race, allowing the humanistic orientation to surpass the ethnocentric orientation (Parham, 1989).

Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) revised the Nigrescence model, giving the model a developmental, life span perspective (p. 243). The researchers reason that the process of becoming black occurs in three developmental patterns. This pattern includes growth from infancy through late adolescence (Nigrescence Pattern A), where the African American’s identity is influenced by former socialization experiences, such as parents or schooling (p. 243). Nigrescence Pattern B occurs as a result of identity conversion, and Nigrescence Pattern C, a process grounded in the works of Parham (1989), refers to the African American whose identity has been “enhanced or modified” (p. 244).

The life span perspective proposed by Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) attempts to demonstrate a relationship between ego-identity and Nigrescence involving six sectors. Sector one (Infancy and Childhood in Early Black Identity Development) includes the importance of the family, specifically “parental influences, kinship interactions, global
family traditions and rituals, and the family’s socioeconomic status” (p. 250), as well as the influence of neighborhoods, communities, schools, and social institutions (p. 251).

Within Sector two, Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) contend that low race salience among preadolescent African Americans result from experiences within the home that are not as focused on race and Black culture, and assume identities related to assimilation, religious beliefs, individualism, or gay and lesbian identity. Likewise, when adolescence are influenced by “historical and cultural distortions about Black people not effectively refuted in and out of the classroom,” then it is likely that such misconceptions will influence the beliefs of the African American adolescent’s thoughts and feelings about Black people. However, preadolescences raised by “race-conscious parents,” are more likely to demonstrate high race salience, developing a self-concept that is influenced by race and culture.

Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) argue that each identity status: foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved can be associated with Pre-encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization (p. 254). The difference, the researchers argue, is that Blacks come into the Nigrescence process holding a “non-race” perspective of identity and as a result of “conversion,” he or she becomes more attuned to a sense of being Black and Black culture (p. 255). The trouble for most youth during this period is more focused on the authenticity of being black, or simply put, they must decide what attitudes or values they will take on from those who influenced them.

The transition from adolescence to Early Adulthood and Adult Nigrescence is summarized by Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) as such:

“If the socialization, maturation, and ecological dynamics that unfold during infancy, childhood, preadolescence, and adolescence define the formative process
of human development, then the wide range of reference group orientations found among many young Black adults are the developmental outcomes of this process” (p. 258).

In other words, the psychological attributes and the perspectives inherited as a result of one’s reference group and former socialization experiences will influence the actions, “challenges, tasks, and opportunities” of the African American adult. Like the preadolescence and adolescence sectors, Sector four and five (Early Adulthood and Adult Nigrescence), reflects emerging identities. High race salience depicts the African American adult whose reference group perspective is heavily influenced by race and Black culture. This sense of Blackness can reflect various differences within groups, such as “Black Nationalists, Afrocentrists, Biculturalists, and Multiculturalist” (p. 258).

An African American adult with a low race salience have developed a sense of the world that does not place Black culture as her or her focused perspective. Although it is not implied that such African Americans can not live happy and successful lives, this group of African Americans are at “risk of Nigrescence,” as any racial experience or encounter can lead them to consider race and Black culture in working to process their experience (p. 260), and forming a revised reference group orientation.

The final cluster in sector 4 describes the young African American adult who has an Internalized Racist perspective. Internalized Racism covers three levels: miseducation, colorism and lookism, and self-hatred. This perspective of Blacks can come from a lack or limited historical knowledge of Blacks a group, the negative feelings or statements about the color of Black people’s skin, and negative images that Blacks may hold of self as a result of societal misconceptions of Black people.
Sector five, or the Adult Nigrescence process, encompasses the Pre-encounter stage, where racial ideas and beliefs that are challenged appear; the Encounter stage, the African American who is now challenged to reconsider previous thoughts and beliefs concerning his or her own race and culture; the Immersion-Emersion stage, or the inner conflict with self to understand the former and the current orientation; Internalization, the bringing forth of a new, internalized perspective; and Internalization-Commitment, where the African American adult becomes committed to the “struggle” (p. 262).

Sector six of this process describes what Parham (1989) refers to as the notion of recycling. Throughout the lives of “well-grounded” African Americans (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001), various challenges and encounters will influence them to develop a refined or enhanced perspective—which Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) refers to as “wisdom” regarding what it means to be black (p. 264). Such experiences occur later in the life of the African American, such as after the age of thirty, where different life circumstances, such as marriage or career changes, begins to influence who the African American is becoming. As such, different life experiences can “trigger” recycling, as the incidences prompt the process and internalizations of newly formed insights.

Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) modified Parham’s recycling model to include the concept of “insights,” as they argued that African American adults at this developmental level are not likely to go back to a “low salience or negative identity” (p. 264). To this end, recycling occurs among African Americans adults with a Black focus and ends with the enhancement of his or her sense of Blackness (p. 265). As such, this stage is referred to in the model as Foundational Black Identity (for Parham, Pre-Encounter). Parham’s second stage, Encounter, is described as Life Span Encounter in...
the modified model, as the researchers argue that the entire foundational identity of the African American adult is not being transformed, but he or she begins to consider an issue that could eventually extend their perspectives. The Immersion-Emersion stage is used the same in both models (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Parham, 1989); however, Internalization is referred to as Internalization of Enhancement in the modified model. Parham’s (1989) model suggest that the process of recycling changes the identity of the African American adult, whereas Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) claims that one’s foundational identity is enhanced or modified, as the individual grows in wisdom, and understands the “complexity, depth, and multidimensionally of what it means to live a Black life” (p. 265).

Jackson (2001) agrees that the idea of black identity development occurred as a result of a social transformation, where social scientist, psychologist, and behavioral scientist were interested in understanding how the identity of Blacks changed over time, and how such changes influenced social group membership, racism, and the various cultural experiences. As such, Jackson (2001) was interested in understanding how transformations could influence the perception of Blacks, how Blacks responded to others, and their actions within an organizational setting. As such, Jackson’s (2001) initial model, the Black Identity Development model, was constructed with a base focused on Erikson’s idea of crisis.

In Jackson’s (2001) updated version of the Black Identity Model, he places emphasis on the importance of transitions, which can be understood as recognition by the individual that issues surrounding their thinking and worldview can be problematic. The Naïve stage describes the influence of socializing agents or one’s perception and
awareness of race. Here, there is no consciousness of race and the transition to the next stage (acceptance) occurs when the individual begins to acknowledge rules guiding institutions and authority, as well as accepting messages reflecting what it means to be black.

Acceptance refers to Black who takes on the perception and assumption that being white is right. Ideologies such as meritocracy and colorblindness help to support institutional rules and expectations associated with the perceptions of individuals within this stage. Transition towards resistance occurs the moment there is a contradiction between one’s experiences and the worldview, which can be influenced by the media, racial encounters, or within interactions.

The Resistance stage refers to the Black person who is aware of the complexities of racism, and realizes that racism exists within attitudes, policies, and behaviors. This emotional stage can reflect a struggle as Blacks may fear losing the approval of whites, but may also feel inadequate and angry. Transitioning to the next stage is realized through the lack of understanding of one’s own personal identity and group identity.

Internalization suggests that Blacks understand how power works and uses it to achieve personal goals. As one’s Black identity is being developed, it is not uncommon for Blacks to adopt a multicultural or bicultural worldview. Finally, this stage reflects learning from other stages, as Jackson (2001) claims, “sensitivity from acceptance, lessons about power from resistance, and self-definition from redefinition brings one into internalization” (p. 25).
Teacher Identity: Dominant Perspectives on Teacher Identity Research

Schempp and Graber (1992) remind us “teachers are responsible for transmitting and transforming a collected body of knowledge on a given subject” (p. 329). Through the process of socialization, teachers transfer the “skills and dispositions” in which they believe to be important, upon their students (p. 329). Thus, the beliefs of teachers are related to personal learning experiences. Through personal schooling experiences, the identity of teachers and teacher beliefs begin to take form. As Lortie (1975) contends, becoming a teacher is a process that begins when teachers were once students, and continues throughout his or her professional careers (Bukor, 2011; Schempp & Graber, 1992). Lortie (1975) refers to this experience as apprenticeship of observation.

Lortie (1975) argues that due to the amount of time children spend in classrooms, they are able to construct their own ideas and assumptions regarding teaching (Schempp & Graber, 1992). Thus, learning how to teach (Lawson, 1983) begin “at birth,” and continues until the decision to enter into the program of teacher education, are made (Richard, Templin, & Graber, 2014). The pre-training experiences become the foundation for role identities (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001), influencing the type of teacher one becomes (Richards, Templin, & Graber, 2014). Additionally, school systems, parents, siblings, and friends (Schempp & Graber, 1992) also influence the personal and professional identity of teachers. Moreover, the lens in which the African American teacher interprets his or her reality is shaped by racial and ethnic identity (Cokley & Helms, 2007), and reflects the resistance or acceptance of societal norms (dominant culture) and African American culture and traditions (Berry, 2009).
As made evident within the research of Delpit (1995), Ladson-Billings (2000), and Solórzano and Yosso (2002), the principles of teaching and learning, the professionalization of teaching and learning, and several of the research methods utilized to investigate teaching and learning, are developed from a white, dominant perspective. Indeed, the demographics of teachers in the United States reflects a cultural mismatch between teachers and students, as approximately 84% of the teaching population is white, middle class women (Feistritzer, 2011). Thus, when considering the research aligned to teacher identity and teacher pedagogy, one must be cognizant of the limitation within perspectives, which stem from dominant narratives surrounding the field of teaching: those of white, middle class women.

That research is explored from a dominant perspective demonstrates the need to discuss research of teacher identity and teacher pedagogy from the two different lenses. First, from the dominant, white perspective, which is the foundation of research surrounding teacher identity, and second, from the perspectives of African American teachers, whose experiences will differ as a result of multiple labels of identity, such as race, class, and gender. Such factors will influence the biographies of African American teachers, as well as shape what they believe about teaching. Not only will the experiences of African American teachers act as counter-narratives that can be compared to the dominant stories that exist within research, but they also offer an additional approach of understanding how the experiences of the African American teacher influences the pedagogy of the African American teacher.
Personal Experiences of African American Teachers

By contrasting the different voices within teacher lives’, specifically how differences by race, ethnicity, and experiences influences identity, a more critical analysis might illustrate how African American teachers envision their possible selves within a white, hegemonic profession. As such, a very intentional approach in understanding the life experiences of the African American teacher provides the opportunity to explore how factors, such as schooling, influences African American teachers individually and collectively.

Bukor (2011) suggest that the development of teacher identity include the personal experiences of teachers. Personal experiences reflect “one’s family background, socio-cultural contexts, and influential people, as well as psychological, emotional, and intellectual features” (p. 50). The analysis of teacher identity encompasses a broad understanding of one’s life experiences before and while teaching. Bukor (2011) attempts to summarize the lifespan development of teacher identity as:

“One’s identity may be expressed in the form of beliefs, assumptions, values, and actions as well as in the various ways one perceives and interprets oneself and the world” (p. 49).

This holistic understanding of teacher identity is critical, as it provides a space to examine the influence of personal experiences within one’s culture, family, community, educational experiences, gender, and perceptions regarding one’s race or ethnicity. Focusing on such personal experiences reveals the complexities by experiences not necessarily understood from a privileged perspective. Although research describes how teachers are products of former socializing experiences, the limited attention to the specific influences and experiences, specifically those of African American teachers,
denies a full understanding of how differences by context and perspectives influences the narratives within research.

**Intersectionality: The Influence of Race and Gender on Identity**

Understanding how specific constructs influence identity development among African American teachers cannot be generalized. Collins (1998) argues that an assumption around collective experiences among Black women undermines the influence of key constructs, such as race, class, and gender, and how each aspect is manifested in one’s identity. Important to understand is the role of power, which is constructed via social institutions, and is influential in the grouping of people. She continues:

“Intersectionality provides an interpretive framework for thinking through how intersections of race and class, or race and gender, or sexuality and class, for example, shape any group’s experience across specific social contexts. The existence of multiple axes within intersectionality means neither that these factors are equally salient in all groups’ experiences nor that they form uniform principles of social organization in defining groups” (p. 208).

Collins (1998) contends that not one person shares the exact experience, as interpretation is dependent on the constructs most salient. Moreover, to acknowledge the ways in which constructs, such as race and gender influence identity, one must consider how oppressive institutions, such as urban schools not only influence the grouping and assumptions of people, but also how experiences within such context influences individual perception and identity.

The next section will look more closely at factors that are considered within research as imperative to the success of urban schools. More specifically, I will explore the role of African American teachers within urban settings, as to reflect on the individual and collective experiences of African American teachers. The discussion will move back and forth, highlighting those elements that research suggest as needed within urban
schools, as well as exploring how such suggestions influences the identity of African American teachers and their approach in teaching.

**Urban Settings**

Examining the development of teacher identity among African American teachers within urban settings draws attention to the influence of context, as well as the factors that are essential for academic success among students in urban settings. To this end, it is imperative that teachers are aware of the approaches, pedagogical orientations, and strategies that are most effective in working with urban students.

In regards to school settings, urban is often times associated with minority students who are categorized as “disorderly, living in poverty, and academically challenged” (Batts, 2012, p. 6). According to Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, and Noguera (2011), urban schools serve more students, and are characterized by the social and economic inequalities. The structural challenges, such as lower student achievement, a lack of instructional consistency, the inexperienced staff of teachers, being under resourced, and low expectations of students (Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, and Noguera, 2011), demonstrate the limitations in opportunities to consistently and effectively serve urban students. The cultural challenges reveal concerns regarding the low-achieving perceptions of race and class by school personnel, the perception of differences between learning styles and intellectual deficiencies, and the limited amount of cultural responsiveness within the practices or policies of education (Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, and Noguera, 2011). Additionally, a report by the United States Government Accountability Office (2009) found that minority students in urban areas are more likely to attend high poverty schools, where 75% or more of the students qualify for free and
reduced lunches, and record a higher rate of discipline incidences than nonurban schools (Porowski, O’Connor, & Passa, 2014).

Concerns of academic success among minority students in urban settings has led to research and approaches which seeks to understand those strategies that are most effective for academic achievement. Important to the social and academic development of students lies within the supports received from others. To this end, an exploration into the influence of relationships on students is imperative to understand.

As Settersten (2015) argues, identity is influenced by the social relationships of others, as well as the composition of one’s location. The “age, sex, race, ethnicity, education, and income sets the conditions on the kinds of people we will be in contact with” (p 219). Additionally, relationships are connected to personal events, as relationships can inspire positive or negative outcomes (Settersten, 2015). The types of people and the supports they are able to access as a result of the relationships developed, are critical to the success of minority youth. Indeed, urban youth need to be supported through meaningful relationships, outside of those with parents, as they have a limited amount of options and resources needed to make important decisions (Settersten, 2007). To this end, relationships are beneficial to the social, academic, and future success of minority youth.

The relationships established within schools are important to the development of minority youth. Thus, minority youth need relationships that are supportive of both the culture of the student, and the academic success of the student. Moje and Martinez’s (2007) contends that schools and school personnel should consider the differences between the culture within school and the cultural practices within the community or
homes of minority students. Additionally, research reveals that minority students are more successful when they are able to work with other minority teachers, as minority teachers are perceived as role models (Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012); when they have a sense of belonging within the school, and when they are engaged in authentic learning opportunities that are connected to one’s community (Moje & Martinez, 2007; Rumberger, 2011). Reflecting on the benefits of minority teachers within urban classrooms, particularly African American teachers, illustrates the need to discuss the role of African American teachers in urban settings. An exploration of the experiences of African American teachers within urban settings might reveal how African American teachers work to support marginalized students within social institutions.

Key to the success of minority students within an oppressive social structure is the relationships and networks that provide the student with resources needed for social mobility. As suggested in the works of Moje and Martinez (2007), individuals working with minority students that come from the same culture or home zone as the student are critical to the success of the minority student. Such cultural brokers represent the pipeline that connects the home and school lives, and allows the minority student to envision him or herself differently.

Stanton-Salazar (2011) describes such individuals as empowerment agents, or individuals willing to work with disadvantaged youth in encouraging them to move beyond their current positions. Empowerment agents are teachers who reflect several things: (1) an awareness of limitations within society to disadvantaged youth; (2) aware of their own level of critical awareness; (3) understands that youth needs their
institutional support; (4) willing to go against the grain of structural constraints, and (5) understands their role as the agent and advocates for disadvantaged youth.

Although empowerment agents are critical resources for disadvantaged youth, Stanton-Salazar (2011) argues the importance of understanding the social networks of the empowerment agent, as the access to other actors are contingent upon the network of the empowerment agent. He describes two different types of networks—low-density and high density. An empowerment agent with a high-density network can act as a bridge connecting youth to resources within a homogeneous network base. Empowerment agents with a low-density network are also able to act as a bridge, linking youth to diverse individuals and resources that are outside of their network base, that the youth may not get otherwise (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

**Professional Experiences of African American Teachers and Teacher Pedagogy**

Naturally, African American teachers bring beliefs from personal histories and stories the their classroom (Agee, 2004). As a result of interactions of others, African Americans negotiate their identities, as they adapt to roles and norms specific to context. This negotiation is complicated as a result of racial identity and oppression, as African American teachers must go back and forth between cultures (Agee, 2004). This balance can be troublesome, as the African American teacher may experience as a result between cultures. Such professional experiences are critical to African American teachers, as they are not only influential to the teacher’s pedagogy, but are also imperative to the academic and social development of youth.

Pedagogy in education refers to an individual holding knowledge of children, specifically how children interpret the world, experience things, and the uniqueness of
each child (Van Manen, 1994). It implies the relationship between the teacher and the student, where the student is able to grow as a result of the context of learning and developing of identity (Van Manen, 1994). Additionally, Duncan-Andrade (2007) asserts that effective pedagogies, such as authentic caring, critical and social justice pedagogy, and culturally relevant instruction, are the basis for good teaching. Viewing teacher pedagogy from this perspective reveals how teachers can strongly influence student achievement (Stanton-Salazar, 2011) and student identity.

Teacher pedagogy is influenced by the experiences of teachers as students (Lortie, 1975; Schempp & Graber, 1990, and Zeichner & Gore, 1992). Yet, such experiences can be damaging to the development of the student (Cummins, 2006). Understanding the learning experiences of the African American teachers in this study provides a perspective in unpacking how the pedagogies of the African American teacher is influenced by their process of socialization. In the same respect, the experiences of the African American teachers will also reveal how past experiences are influencing his or her current professional experiences. Although research describes many different approaches of teaching and learning that are most effective for minority students, it is also critical to explore if the African American teacher has experienced such practices. As noted by Ladson-Billings (2009), “the pedagogical instruction that many teachers of African American students received, leads to intellectual death” (p. 17). Consequently, it is important to understand how the former teachers of African American teachers were able to negotiate their identities, and how this process influenced academic achievement and tension.
Within the process of negotiating their identities, teachers must be able to reflect on personal and professional experiences, as well as consider the experiences of his or her students, to provide them with authentic learning experiences that would foster academic success. As suggested in the research of Freire (2000), such approaches do not view the teacher as holding all knowledge, but holds that students and teachers both bring knowledge and experiences to the classroom, and are able to learn from each other. Freire’s (2000) research of oppressed peoples sheds light on how dominant perspective and knowledge is embedded within social institutions. Additionally, Freire’s (2000) approach allows for individuals to reflect and act, encouraging a social transformation through authentic learning experiences.

Various theorist and researchers have explored the different methods of teaching and learning that are most useful to the academic achievement of minority students (Cummins, 2006; Dalton & Tharpe, 2002; Freire, 2002). For example, Moje & Martinez, (2007) and Rumberger, (2011) suggest that minority students are more academically successful when they are provided with a sense of belonging within the school and are engaged in authentic learning opportunities that are connected to one’s community. Such learning experiences takes place within authentic context, where learning reflects the ways in which knowledge will be utilized in real-life situations; contains authentic activities; access to expert facilitators who are able to model the process; provides a space for multiple perspectives; is supportive of collaboration, reflection, and coaching; and allows for authentic assessments to evaluate learning (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). To this end, authentic learning can be useful in working with urban youth, as it provides
youth with experiences that connects the lives’ of the students with the classroom, communities, and society (Azzarito & Ennis, 2003).

Although research exists that suggest the need to provide authentic learning experiences, Mantei and Kervin (2009) argue, “teaching is governed by policy that mandates the types of learning experiences (and sometimes the specific content) that must be taught in classrooms” (p. 3). For example, as a result of policy constraints within education, opportunities to allow for teacher autonomy are limited, as standardized curriculum and assessment does not provide sufficient opportunities to interrogate dominant perspectives embedded within social institutions (Jennings, Swidler, & Koliba, 2005). Although authentic experiences within the community are described as being supportive for academic achievement among minorities, state developed standards are criticized for not including the importance of the differences by context—or place. Critics of standardization argue that the existence of standards have minimized local community control and voice within educational curriculum, will produce a mass of workers that are concerned with global existence rather than community sustainability, creates a lack of experiential learning opportunities, and allows for less attention to the needs and interest of the community (Jennings, Swidler, & Koliba, 2005).

To provide authentic learning experiences, Tobin et al. (2014) suggest that teachers consider the teaching pedagogy of place, or place-based education, where teachers must consider the places in which minority students own, and not rent. This perspective holds that teachers are mindful of the relevant experiences and identity of his or her students, as teaching and learning explores who individuals are, in relation to location, culture, and community (Tobin et al., 2014).
However, Gruenewald (2003) and Haymes (1995) argues that a teaching pedagogy that is critical of both place—specifically geographical location and contextual settings, as well as one that explores the “social, historical, political, and economical contradictions, while considering issues of race, gender, religion, and class, is essential to providing authentic learning experiences for oppressed peoples. Thus, a critical pedagogy of place not only affords minorities a space to examine the educational, social, and economical injustices in which they experience, but it is also sensitive to the importance of place, specifically how teaching and learning will vary by geographical location and context (Gruenewald, 2003). Such a pedagogy provides minorities a method to “decolonize and rehabinatate,” or reflect and act, on the specific elements within each context that have continued to oppress the individuals existing within each context.

Other approaches to increasing the academic achievement among minorities are developed around the influence of culture. For instance, Gay (2002) proposes a method of teaching minority students, or culturally responsive teaching, which seeks to utilize the “culture, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). The cultural knowledge in which teachers need to obtain to be culturally responsive includes the importance of communal living among members, the interactions between adults and children, and an understanding of gender roles (Gay, 2002).

Similar to Gay’s (2002), Paris and Alim (2014) suggest the use of culturally sustaining pedagogy, which allows for a culturally pluralistic learning environment. They argue that teaching and learning must be done in a way that the heritage and culture of minorities are recognized and included within the curriculum. In this way, students
and teachers learn *with* each other, as the sustainment of linguistic and literate cultural norms are honored in the classroom among diverse students. The researchers warn that we must not make assumptions of the cultural ways of others. Instead, we must be “open to sustaining them in both the traditional and evolving ways they are lived and used by young people” (p. 91).

Edmin’s (2011) reality pedagogy describes five steps that can be used in classrooms that allow teachers and students to engage with each other. He argues that reality pedagogy allows for learning based upon the realities of youth as the teacher uses such stories to provide relevant pedagogy to their students.

The first step, cogenerative dialogues, reflects a process of developing the norms, collective decisions, and rules of the classroom. Through scheduled meetings, students and their classroom teacher are able to meet to “deconstruct” what happened in the classroom and improve the learning environment (p. 287). Coteaching involves the student and teacher switching roles, as the student is able to present information in a way that they believe is more relevant to students. The teacher assists the student in preparation and observes the student during the lesson. Cosmopolitanism allows for students to select the roles and responsibilities within the classroom, as to foster a sense of belonging. Context involves bringing in artifacts to the classroom that is reflective of the student’s background. Content is a step that shows the teacher’s “willingness to expose and embrace the limitations in their content knowledge within the classroom” (p. 291).

Lee (2007) asserts that instructional curriculum must include subject matter and the knowledge of the culture and interactions among the families and peers of students.
that occur outside of the school setting. She suggests the Cultural Modeling Framework, “which concentrates on the practices in which the youth directly engage out of school, and not so much ones for which they are peripheral participants in the activities of adults” (Lee, 2007, p. 36). Here, the culturally responsive teacher is able to support students in solving complex problems by tapping into their prior knowledge and making connections with subject matter.

What is consistent regarding teacher pedagogy and academic achievement among minority youth, is the attention to place—be it location or the influence of culture within one’s community, the importance of providing learning opportunities that are both relevant and engaging to minority students, and the knowledge that teachers and students bring to learning as they negotiate their identities. To this end, the extent in which African American teachers utilized place to support teaching and learning may be embedded within his or her teaching pedagogy. A careful examination of the personal biographies and professional experiences of African American teachers provided a space to explore how African American teachers interrogate or reinforce the dominant perspectives embedded within social institutions.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Rationale for Research Approach

Clandinin (2007) argues that the narrative affords the opportunity to explore the experiences of teachers within a profession that is oftentimes deeply misunderstood. The majority of the narratives of teachers’ lives, knowledge, and experiences, reflect stories and perspectives that neglect to consider the lived experiences of African American teachers (Clandinin, 2007). Excluded from the literature are the experiences of teachers that are influenced by race, ethnicity, religion, class, and gender. Such exclusion from the literature limits the knowledge that can be explored and researched. Exploring the development of African American teacher identity is critical in “combating the hegemonizing power of dominant stories that extends their continuing normativization and so potentially prevents other stories from being legitimized” (McNiff, 2007, p. 311). To this end, research surrounding the lived experiences of African American teachers is the stories of African American teachers, from a perspective of research that aligns to biographical and professional experiences. Such experiences are best captured from a narrative method of research. During a time when accountability is at the forefront of policy and educational reform, the influence of change in teaching and learning will
likely impact the professional identity of a teacher. For the African American teacher, policy and reform may create additional conflict and complicate existing struggles to overcome oppression and power within the context of educational institutions, specifically as it relates to the absence of black teachers narratives in this era of school accountability. Qualitative research methods acknowledges context and therefore better captures this inquiry, which is designed to examine the experiences of African American teachers, who may struggle to find self within various contexts, such as hegemonic institutions.

**Rationale for Qualitative Research**

Galletta (2013) argues that qualitative research allows for research that investigates the complexities within experiences, phenomena, and interactions. Within qualitative research, the relationship between the researcher and researched, or the knowledge constructed and reconstructed, provides a space to unpack the multiple experiences that are unique to each individual (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, qualitative research is useful within this study, as it allows for an understanding of particularities, processes, and phenomena that are contextually bound. Qualitative research provides a perspective that reflects the intersection of individual beliefs, action, and culture, or spaces where rich descriptions matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Finally, through qualitative research the researcher is also able to explore issues, empower others, and develop theories (Creswell, 2013). Within this study, qualitative research provides a lens in which to examine the individual experiences of African American teachers, and how the experiences of the teacher influences who they are constantly becoming
Interpretive Paradigms

The purpose of this study is to understand how biographical and professional experiences of African American teachers influence the ongoing development of his or her identity, beliefs, and pedagogy. As such, exploring the complexities within teacher identity, specifically how experiences influence who the teacher is becoming, as well as her or his use of instructional strategies, must be approached through several different paradigms. This study lends itself to several lenses, which will be utilized to examine this ongoing process: social constructivist, critical race theory, and feminism.

Guba (1990) explains how one’s assumptions and beliefs should align with a specific paradigm of research. The social constructivist paradigm allows for the researcher to reveal personal subjectivity, providing space for transparency of the researcher’s assumptions and beliefs. Additionally, this paradigm acknowledges the complexities within multiple realities, and the opportunities to construct and reconstruct meaning with participants. Social constructivism also allows the researcher to understand the world of the participants.

The ontological beliefs of a social constructivist consider the equal and multiple realities of the participants (Creswell, 2013; Havercamp & Young, 2007; Hays & Singh, 2012). The examination of the experience of multiple participants will allow for an understanding of different perspectives (Creswell, 2013), which will reveal how experiences influence African American teachers individually. Through the social constructivist paradigm, reality and meaning is co-constructed, reflecting reciprocity between the researcher and the individual experiences of the participants (epistemological approach). Through reflexivity, the values of the researcher will be exposed, as the
researcher acknowledges subjectivity and its influence on interpretation (axiological perspective).

To honor the assumptions of the social constructivist researcher within this study, I will explore the biographies and professional experiences of several African American teachers. The knowledge produced from this study will provide the chance to re-construct existing knowledge of the personal and professional experiences African American teacher. Through transparency and reflexivity, I will expose the influence of my own personal experiences on interpretation. CRT and feminist paradigms align with transparency, reflexivity and the notion of exposing what I believe to be critical constructs that influence my current professional perspective.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education is utilized to focus on race and racism within a profession where identification of privilege and power are difficult to explore (Chapman, 2011). Solórzano & Yosso (2002) suggest the use of CRT, as it “advances a strategy to foreground and account for the role of race and racism in education and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of opposing or eliminating other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and national origin” (p. 25). Parker (2015) argues that within education, “racism and racial capitalism has been and continues to be embedded within the structures, discourses, and policies that guide the daily practices of schools and universities which seek to make race a commodity within current neo-liberal politics” (p. 199). As a result of inequalities within education, research should be investigated in a manner that exposes the injustices of education (Chapman, 2011). To this end, CRT will allow for race and racism to be foregrounded in complicating what is considered as accepted knowledge within the
research surrounding teacher identity. As previously noted, much of the research around teacher identity is presented from a dominant perspective and discourse, and does not include the voice of persons living on the margin. This study seeks to examine how the experiences of African American teachers influence the development of one’s professional identity, within a context of social institutions built upon hierarchy, power, and oppression. Such discourse may provide counter-narratives to the limited perspectives in research, which generalizes the stories and experiences of teachers. The inclusion of the experiences of African American teachers provides a different perspective than those experiences that reflect positions of privilege and power, adding a more diverse understanding of professional identity. Therefore, CRT theory is essential to this study, as it challenges the “business as usual” approach for schooling, and exchanges it for an empowerment approach of teaching (Chapman, 2011).

CRT is developed from five principals: (1) race and racism as the center of the research, (2) a confrontation of traditional research approaches, (3) providing a transformative option to combat subordination, (4) consideration of classroom experiences of students of color, whose experiences are influenced by race, gender, and class, and (5) the use of transdisciplinary approach to understand “the effects of racism, sexism, and classism” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27).

The assumptions of Critical Race Theory (CRT) are explored within the research of Creswell (2013), where he describes the justifications for the use of CRT. The ontological assumption considers the nature of reality that is based upon power and oppression, and is understood through constructs of race, ethnicity, class, gender, mental competencies, and sexual preference (Creswell, 2013). In the case of the African
American teachers within this study, understanding the ongoing development of his or her professional identities means considering how race might influence beliefs and pedagogy—specifically in regards to educational reform, the achievement of students, and the relationships established within schools. From an epistemological perspective, analyzing oppression and power within social institutions from the perspective of African American teachers, may yield knowledge to transform the methods of teaching and learning. Attention to oppression and power within systems also calls for the need of the researcher to have familiarity with the culture of the communities that is being researched. As such, the knowledge of the culture of the community allows the researcher to understand the limitations within the research, and within one’s own biases.

Similar to CRT, the feminist perspective, seeks to investigate the struggle with power within recognized forms of accepted knowledge informed by gender relations. When examining research from a feminist perspective, issues related to inequities can be explored, as this approach lends itself to the analysis of marginalized individuals working through power, agency, and transformation. Thus, a critical analysis of teacher identity will provide the space to consider “class, gender, race, and historical/contemporary alienation of particular groups” (Zeichner & Gore, 1990, p. 11). More specifically, the feminist approach affords the opportunity to unpack how the intersection of race, class, gender, age, sexual orientation, and ethnicity influences the development of teacher identity within systems build upon patriarchic and racist ideologies (Collins, 1998). By exploring the experiences of black teachers, it is possible that a clearer understanding of structural oppression might reveal the complexities surrounding the retention and recruitment of black teachers.
The feminist paradigm also affords the opportunity to tell stories that counter what is perceived as the accepted narrative. As such, the biographies and professional experiences of the African American teachers within this study may problematize issues within research and social institutions, as the feminist approach recognizes evidence of privilege and power, supports hopes of transforming methods of research, challenges the current discourse within the research of teacher identity, and confronts the approaches of teaching and learning that help to reproduce social injustices and inequalities within education. The inclusion of African American teacher narratives provides a situational standpoint for those located at the intersection of racism and sexism (Collins, 1991).

The ontological assumption of feminism suggest that reality is based upon “power and identity struggles” (Creswell, 2013, p. 37). As reaffirmed in their research on the historical influences of African American teacher identities, Roberts and Andrews (2014) argue that “an uninterrogated acceptance of contemporarily designated identities may render the identified persons or collective groups as unstable, while simultaneously removing the burden of responsibility from the narrators who materially and discursively oppressed them” (p.73). The researchers refer to designated identities as identities that can “alter the collective understanding of the masses while oppressing a selected few for the purpose of diminishing or altering narratives that could significantly change the way the identified are viewed” (p. 72). Considering how dominant perspectives of African American teacher identities result in theories of action in the areas of teacher training, professional development, policy, and research, the feminist paradigm provides a space to consider the reality of African American teachers, who must constantly struggle with balancing their identity as an African American. Such perspectives can be lost within
the dominant narratives typically explored within school reform research. Therefore, the feminist paradigm is useful in tearing down barriers of power and privilege, specifically those voices and experiences of African American teachers who are forced to adjust to the values and culture of dominant society.

The epistemological beliefs of the feminist paradigm refer to reality through the study of social structures, or power, and freedom. An historical overview of the journey of African American teachers collectively sheds light on the influence of policy at the “macro level (in the case of Brown v. Board of Education), and at the micro-level (state and district level implementation),” specifically how desegregation has influenced the process of teacher qualification, teacher placement (Witty, 1982), teacher professionalism, and teacher identity among African American teachers (Roberts & Andrews, 2014, p. 71). The feminist researchers explore how historical events and policies have displaced African American teachers, and how processes such as the firing, retraining, and rehiring of African American teachers during the beginnings of desegregation, have encouraged the questioning of teaching qualifications of African American teachers by Whites.

At a time in education, where policy and educational reform guides the processes of social structures, the feminist paradigm also affords for a focus on specific elements, such as student achievement and teacher accountability, to understand how privatized interest and government-developed initiatives influence the ongoing identity of African American teachers. As the push for equity and achievement among low achieving schools continues to drive policy and educational decisions, many unintended consequences (Valli & Buese, 2007), such as role change among teachers (Valli & Buese,
2007), the displacement of African American teachers within the teaching profession
(Witty, 1982), the valuing of test scores and measurements over community involvement
and student engagement, and the limited opportunities for teacher autonomy within the
classroom (Burke & Adler, 2013; Valli & Buese, 2007), have caused tension between
policy makers and some teachers and administrators on the ground. (Lipsky, 2010).
Additionally, differences in views as it relates to rating student learning among
stakeholders continue to prevent a uniformed method of teaching and learning, as well as
developing appropriate teacher accountability measures.

The axiological assumption of the feminist paradigm is welcoming to diverse
values within the “standpoint of various communities” (Creswell, 2013, p. 37).
Differences by gender and experience are valued, as both shape interpretation and
meaning. To this end, ensuring that the perspectives and voice of African American
teachers are recognized as meaningful is critical in developing a more thorough
understanding of how personal and professional experiences influences the ongoing
development of African American teacher identity. Additionally, the counter stories of
African American teachers can reveal new concerns regarding teaching and learning that
can be used to foster change within policy, educational reform, and teacher recruitment
and training. Finally, as expressed in the writings of Lather (1986), the feminist
paradigm values the reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the participant, as
well as the subjectivity of the researcher, which is evident within and analysis as a result
of reflexivity.


**Theoretical Framework**

Exploring the ongoing development of African American teacher identity requires a discussion around key elements and experiences that contribute to the development of African American teachers. Thus, it is important to consider the personal and professional experiences that have influenced the identity, beliefs, and pedagogy of African American teachers. The following section outlines the foundations for reflecting on the specific tenets to be examined in understanding the on-going development of African American teacher identity.

As suggested in the research of Erickson (1968), Cross (1971), Parham (1989), Marcia (1966), and Jackson (2001), the individual experiences and differences by context are vital to the development of one’s overall identity. Additionally, personal experiences, the influence of others, and various learning experiences are also critical in exploring who the African American teacher is continuously becoming. Within the research surrounding identity and teacher identity, there exists a limitation in perspectives of identity development, as much of the literature explores teacher identity development from a dominant perspective. To this end, unpacking the identity of African American teachers reflects a process of examining how race and ethnic identity development, experiences, class, societal and political context, as well as the impact of others on one’s life, has influenced the African American teacher within different contexts.

The development of the beliefs and identity of the African American teacher will be explored through personal biographies. As noted in the research of Erikson (1968), Marcia (1966), and Phinney (1989), family, schooling experiences, community, and religion can influence the development of the African American teacher. Such
experiences and places are important to the foundation of personal identity and beliefs. In Tobin et al. (2014), the authors’ discussion of identity development and place provides a very clear understanding of how one is able to assemble his or her identity. As one is becoming, he or she “picks and chooses” from resources, such as memories, new interactions, and experiences from different places to “develop, confirm, and maintain one’s identity” (p. 347). The researcher concludes that identity development occurs as one is finding his or her place among others, as the “geographical places where one learns his or her place, such as his or her role in the community” are critical in shaping identity (p. 348). Hence, a careful investigation of the personal biographies of the African American teacher affords the opportunity to explore the different experiences, people, and memories that have influenced the on-going development of the African American teacher, as well as the pedagogies of African American teachers.

According to the research of Cross (1971), Marcia (1966), Phinney (1989), and Tatum, (1997), African American adolescents experiences encounters, where he or she begins to question the assumptions and beliefs impressed upon the adolescent by his or her parents or significant adults in their lives. It is during this time that the African American adolescent begins to envision who they could potentially be in the future. Additionally, who the African American adolescent aspires to become is also influenced by cultural and societal values, as experiences within various contexts also influences who he or she is becoming.

African American adolescent also begins to explore the role that race and ethnicity plays within their perception of self and ability. The depth of one’s racial and ethnic identity depends upon the degree in which race and ethnicity are reinforced within
one’s family, as well as within different settings. As the African American adolescent progresses towards adulthood, he or she will encounter experiences where he or she begins to question the influence of race and power. The encounters, within school, the community, or within one’s family, will influence how he or she racially identifies. As a result of such experiences, the African American teacher develops his or her own perception of who he or she is, as well as what he or she believes about his or her future and societal values.

**Research Approach**

This study seeks to explore the different experiences of African American teachers, specifically how biographical experiences, context, race/ethnicity, and events influence the ongoing identity development of the African American teacher. Through narrative methodology, I planned to examine the biographical stories of African American teachers. As explained in the works of Clandinin (2007), by exploring the stories of educators, researchers and participants can begin to challenge the oppressive power of dominant stories that persistently shape what is considered normal and accepted. Moreover, attention to the experiences of teachers has been at the forefront of research, as recent research has recognized the importance of the narratives of teachers’ lives and experiences, specifically in understanding the role of the teacher within the development of curriculum and pedagogy (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007).

To begin to explore the art of teaching, Elbaz-Luwisch (2007) suggests the consideration of the individual and group experiences of the teacher. Elbaz-Luwisch (2007) also holds that an understanding of teachers’ experiences requires attention to their personal beliefs—which are rooted within context, influenced by history, and woven
within the layered fabrics of “schools, school systems, mandated curricula, ideologies, pedagogical trends, and reform process” (p. 359).

The complexity in unpacking the experience of African American teachers illustrates the need to recognize how experiences and context influence African American teachers differently. Additionally, the various experiences will also affect the development of identity among African American teachers, demonstrating the limitations of research that aims for generalizability. Thus, my decision to explore the development of African American teacher identity can be best understood in Pinnegar and Daynes’ (2007) research of the turn in narrative inquiry.

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) describe the four turns within narrative inquiry that are related to the “strategic” methods of thinking (p. 7). The researchers state that the turns do not occur in any particular order, and entry or position depend on the relationship between the researcher and the participant, as well as the experiences of both and the interactions between them.

The first turn is the movement from objectivity to a more interpretive method of understanding meaning. At this point, the researcher and researched enter in a relationship with one another, and learn from each other. In constructing the narrative, the researcher and researched collaborate to develop meaning. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) argue that researchers should understand that the researcher and researched co-exist at the same point in time within a particular context, holding different worldviews and history, and as a result, will both grow from the research process. My experiences as an African American teacher has provided me with a perspective and understanding that
is helpful in interrogating the assumptions related to teacher training and professional identity.

In the second turn, the researcher realizes that numbers do not reflect the complexities within different experiences, as they may not be trustworthy ways of “providing a research account” (p. 20). Within this study, I intentionally focused on the experiences of teachers, as I am more concerned with the individual account of each story. To generalize findings would take away from the personal and authentic stories of participants, which lead to the third turn. The third turn involves the researcher who decides to move from a general understanding of a phenomenon to a more focused understanding. This decision demonstrates the researcher’s value in individual experiences. Turn four, or blurring knowledge, occurs because the researcher realizes that there are multiple ways of knowing. The multiple stories and experiences revealed within the narratives of participants will provide a complicated perspective of reality, as each participant’s experiences will differ by context, time, and beliefs.

As noted within the research of Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), my beliefs regarding the importance of individual experiences best aligns with narrative methodology. Creswell (2013) contends that narrative research as a method includes an account of an event, action, or chronologically connected series of events or actions, that can be oral or written. Within narrative research, the differences by perspectives can be explored, revealing the various ways in which experiences, context, and interactions influences the stories of the researched. As a result, the researcher is able to explore the complexities within individual experiences.
Narrative studies are also useful for research that explores the lived experiences of multiple individuals through life course stages (Creswell, 2013). Narrative inquiry lends itself to this study as it also aligns to a feminist perspective of research. Through this paradigm, the researcher is able to abandon one-dimensional ideologies and unpack how institutional practices among the researched or researcher, influence perspectives and identity (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Thus, feminist researchers are not limited to exploring the experiences of women only. Instead, feminists acknowledge the “multiple intersections of identity,” as a method of analyzing “sources of oppression” within institutional systems (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 27).

Within this study, the feminist paradigm will be utilized to understand how experiences by gender among African American teachers might complicate the generalized ideologies and assumptions about African American teachers. The experiences of the African American teacher as the narrator, coupled with the influence of culture, demonstrates the need for a platform that is appreciative of personal experiences, triumphs, and challenges most critical in understanding the story of the narrator. More specifically, the different challenges and situations illustrate the varied strategies used by the narrator, to cope or adapt to life experiences. Through the feminist lens, one is able to explore how individual experiences and interactions are not only complex, but may also change each time the story is retold.

It is also imperative that the researcher utilizes strategies and develops questions that provide the narrator with moments to retell his or her stories (Galletta, 2013). Such an approach lends itself to the social constructivist paradigm, as the researcher and participant co-construct stories (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, exploring the narratives
of African American teachers affords the opportunity to interrogate dominant perspectives and discourse within research, policy, and teacher training. Through such analysis, a space is created that recognizes how social institutions influence the personal and professional experiences of African American teachers differently. In doing so, as noted by Elbaz-Luwisch (2000), narrative inquiry affords the chance to utilize the restorying of experiences to invoke change.

Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) summarize narrative inquiry as “collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus” (p. 20). According to this argument, narrative occurs within three commonplaces: temporality, sociality, and place. The researchers contend that each aspect of commonplace can provide the researcher with a conceptual framework for narrative inquiry.

Temporality within this study will be understood through the past, present, and future of African American teachers (p. 3). This dimension demonstrates the ever-changing stories within narrative inquiry, as both the researcher and the participants attend to the different points in time while constructing the story. Temporality is essential in unpacking the narratives of African American teachers, as each experience reflects an ongoing process of becoming. To this end, temporality allowed me to consider the different points within each teacher’s experiences that were pivotal in shaping his or her identity.

The sociality dimension explores the social and personal conditions. Within the personal dimension, conditions such as moral dispositions and hopes of the researcher and participant are examined. The social conditions are those conditions in which events
transpire, and also reflects how culture or social institutions influences experiences. Understanding the individual experiences of African American teachers might allow me to understand the nuances surrounding experience, culture, perception, and beliefs within a profession established upon the principles and perspectives of the dominant majority. My hope is to explore and become more aware of how different social contexts influence personal conditions across multiple experiences.

Although the sociality dimension focuses on values and experiences within various social contexts, the differences within such experiences are critical in explaining the diversity within groups and individual experiences. For example, Elbaz-Luwisch (2000) argues that teachers narratives offer the opportunity to examine conflicting discourse, as a teacher’s life story can be “torn by conflicting allegiances and appears on a rockier moral horizon, shaped by discourses that do not agree” (p. 366). As such, narrative inquiry provides the space to examine themes across the experiences of African American teachers, while also complicating commonalities, by attending to the experiences that are unique to the individual, through voice and identity.

Also important to narrative inquiry is the concept of place. This idea suggests that place and identity are linked, and are a part of the narrator’s story. Therefore, the past experiences of African American teachers, before and after teacher training, coupled with place—where each experience has occurred, will likely influence their perception and mold their interpretation of their personal experiences regarding what they believe as African American teachers. Place, or context, is a necessary element within this study because it helps to form what is known to be true about the profession of teaching (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2000) Considering place within each story will allow me to understand how
experiences have shaped identity, the approaches of teaching and learning, and the pedagogical beliefs of African American teachers.

**Research Context**

This study seeks to understand the experiences of African American teachers who teach in urban settings, and how such experiences influence his or her ongoing identity, beliefs, and pedagogy. To this end, the context of this study will reflect the urban settings in which African American teachers are currently employed. In the wake of a time where teacher accountability has driven the direction of educational reform, the research context reflects concerns surrounding standardized assessment and school choice options. These concerns are imperative in understanding a context in which policy makers seek to solve concerns regarding equity and equality in education.

Within this research, I will study the narratives of African American teachers working in a setting where there is a high concentration of low-income families and a large population of minority students (Batts, 2012), higher enrollments (on average) than rural or suburban schools, limited resources for teachers and students, and classroom behavior concerns. Such a setting will be considered urban. Additionally, concerns such as academic achievement, economic stability, and various health and safety risk are also characteristics of urban schools (National Center For Education Statistics, 1996). Finally, urban schools within this study may also reflect issues related to a lack of instructional consistency, inexperienced staff or teachers, and may have low expectations of students (Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011).

The research context of this study consists of a region of urban setting, in a mid-western state. The urban settings include a larger urban city, and two smaller, mid-sized
urban cities. The distance between the largest urban city and the two other urban cities is 39 miles and 60 miles, respectively. Each of the urban cities is surrounded by smaller suburban cities, where distance from each urban city ranges from 6 to 10 miles (www.gomapper.com).

According to the 2014 U.S. Census (www.census.gov) the population for the largest city, City A, was 389,521. Racial/ethnic demographics reflect the following: White alone, 37.3%; Black or African American, 53.3%; American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.3%; Asian alone, 1.8%; Two or more races, 2.8%; Hispanic or Latino, 10%; and White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, 33.4%. The median household income (2010-2014) is $26,179, and about 35.9% of persons living in City A are living below the poverty level.

City B, which is about 39 miles from City A, had a population of 197,859, in 2014. Additionally, City B is 62.2% Whites; 31.5% Black or African American, 0.2% American Indian and Alaska Native alone; 2.1% Asian alone; 3.2% Two or more races; 2.1% Hispanic or Latino; and 61.2% White alone, not Hispanic or Latino. The median household income for this city, from 2010-2014, is $34,139, with about 26.7% persons living below poverty.

City C is the smaller urban setting. It is approximately 60 miles away from City A, and the population of City C in 2014 is 72,297. The racial/ethnic demographics for this city is the following: White alone, 69.1%; Black or African American alone, 24.2%; American Indian or Alaska Native alone, 0.5%; Asian alone, 0.3%; Two or More Races, 4.8%; Hispanic or Latino, 2.6%; White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, 67.9%. The
median household income (2010-2014) is $29,980, and persons living below poverty for this city are 32.4%.

Although research exists that argues the need to define urban, specifically as it relates to a particular study, the intent of this section is not to define urban, but to provide a thorough understanding of how the term urban is utilized within an educational context. In doing so, a brief discussion around the historical and political influences of urban development is necessary, as to fully explore the current state of urban education. The conversation will provide a basis for understanding the on-going development of African American teacher identity in relation to the complexities of urban settings.

Stone (1998) provides an understanding for the term urban that reflects how historical, societal, political, and economical changes have influenced education. In his research, he asserts that urban reflects “jurisdictions that are large and old enough to include socially and economically diverse populations” (p. 3). He also suggests that within such areas are larger concentrations of poverty and people of color. In addition to trends of metropolitan growth within urban areas, an increase of population has also occurred. Although urban communities are not identical, two issues remain relevant to this discussion of urban settings and how such concerns influence the school systems within urban areas: poverty, and an association of urban areas reflecting a higher population of minorities (Stone, 1998).

To further explore the complexities of urban settings, a discussion surrounding the influence of time is also necessary. Stone (1998) captures the importance of recognizing differences between and within different urban settings in the following statement: “understanding variations from place to place within a given time period is important, but
change over time also offers a useful perspective” (p. 4). Stone’s (1998) attention to time is imperative within this study, as historical, political, and societal changes have influenced the development and current state of urban education. Moreover, an analysis of the historical, political, and societal changes that have occurred will also reveal how such changes have influenced African American teachers over time.

**Historical Shifts in Education**

The first major historical shift in education began in the 1920’s and lasted until the 1960’s (Wong & Shen, 2003). Labeled as the progressive reform, this time period reflects educational decisions that were based upon scientific measures, such as student IQ, the critique of teacher and student performance, providing equity and equality among poverty stricken neighborhoods, assumptions regarding student learning potential, professional development among teachers, and appropriate teaching approaches (Wong & Shen, 2003). In the 1960’s, changes within urban education reflected social and economic issues, as the civil rights movement—which challenged equality and equity in education, and white flight—which drastically changed the demographics of urban communities, became more apparent and more inviting to the influence of policy and politics (Wong & Shen, 2003; Henig & Rich, 2004). During this time, urban communities were characterized as poor and ghetto, and reflected a homogenous population of residents. By the 1990’s, low student achievement and the limited resources of funding within urban settings had become an issue that many elected officials in large cities included within his or her campaign (Wong & Shen, 2003).
Political Influences on Education: Urban School Dilemmas and Solutions

As a result of the state of the urban schools during mid-1990, large urban cities were taken over by state government. This approach created other concerns, further complicating the development of urban education. Increasingly, attempts to academically and financially support urban public schools began at the state level (Wong & Shen, 2003).

State takeover strategies included developing a system of accountability through the implementation of standards, providing additional resources to support failing schools, and the recruitment of “non-traditional leaders,” such as mayors, businessmen, and military leaders to change the current strategies and culture of the organization (Wong & Shen, 2003, p. 7). However, due to specific schooling conflicts from the 1960’s to the 1990’s, such as racial tension in integrating schools, frustration with property tax burdens, fear of strikes among teachers due to disagreements with collective bargaining, and a decrease in the amount of political advocates for urban residence, the need to develop a new approach in supporting urban schools became apparent. Additionally, city leaders became more invested in utilizing public education to “improve the quality of social and economic life, such as safety, parks, schools, and recreational services for families who lived in the city” (Wong & Shen, 2003, p. 11). To this end, mayors in many big cities were able to use such a holistic approach to justify the takeover of local public schools.

For example, the mayoral takeover occurring in City A in 1995, began as a result of community frustration of student performance. In 1990, the mayor assembled a summit, where community activist and stakeholders were invited to explore a collective
vision for the school system. Although the summit was developed to involve others, issues surrounding the inclusion of citizens, as well as the division of class made mobilization difficult (Henig & Rich, 2003). Through state intervention and legislation, the mayor was able in 1966 to use his relationship with the African American community to appoint a school board, leaving little opportunity for community voice.

The mayoral takeover is important to discuss, as mayors are able to implement sanctions, related to standards and accountability, on low-performing schools, which are mostly urban or rural schools (Wong & Shen, 2003). Such efforts of reform aligned are also less concerned with essential players, such as teacher unions and certain interest groups (Wong & Shen, 2003). Although City A is the only city out of the three within this study that has experienced mayoral takeover, each city has similar options and approaches that are put into place as a means to provide additional equitable educational opportunities.

For instance, other reform initiatives associated with state level and decentralized approaches includes school choice-based reform. School choice-based reform, based upon parental preference, was created to provide a more market-oriented environment for public and charter schools, where parties competed for funding in the form of student enrollment. Additionally, school vouchers in City A and later state wide were also made available to parents who have children attending a low-performing school, and wish to send their son or daughter to a private or parochial school (Wong & Shen, 2003). However, recent concerns around low student performance and funding issued to charter schools have surfaced, as the debate between public and charter school accountability
measures continues to complicate what are considered as equitable opportunities for parents and students living in urban communities.

Federal policy changes have also influenced the state of urban education. More specifically, federal policy has included methods to ensure that teachers are highly qualified, and that funding and accountability measures are in place. Such strategies within federal policy were intended to provide more equitable and equal educational opportunities to disadvantaged youth.

Federal government intervention initially began with the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) of 1965. President Lyndon Johnson implemented the act, with the goal of providing disadvantaged youth more equitable educational opportunities through financial support (Thomas & Brady, 2005). Although President Ronald Reagan’s administration recognized low academic achievement among public schools, federal education program funding was cut under his presidency, to reduce the role of the government in public education (Thomas & Brady, 2005). In *A Nation at Risk*, a report produced by Reagan’s administration, ideas to improve education, such as “the need to include higher academic standards, increased student course requirements, longer school days, and changes within teacher training and retention,” were emphasized, specifically for state and local use, with the purpose of limiting the role of government in educational reform (pp. 53-54). In addition to this change was a more critical analysis of how funds were being allocated to schools serving disadvantaged youth, as less disadvantaged youth were being supported financially. During an educational summit under the presidency of George H.W. Bush in 1989, it was determined that programs utilizing Title I funds needed to include “greater levels of
educational accountability based on higher academic standards and national testing of students” (p. 54). As policy makers looked to align funding to accountability measures, legislation was developed as a means of ensuring higher academic standards for disadvantaged students.

For example, in 2002, George W. Bush reauthorized ESEA and renamed it NCLB Act of 2001, which was developed to allow all American students, regardless of race or socioeconomic background, the right to have a quality education. The act continued to focus on servicing disadvantaged youth, specifically in with the goal of supporting such students in reaching grade-level proficiency and improving academic skills (Thomas & Brady, 2005). Additionally, the act also included other objectives, such as an increase in accountability based upon results; alignments of research-based practices to teaching and learning; better quality instruction; and empowerment of parents through parental choice in education (Thomas & Brady, 2005).

Within NCLB, schools and students were expected to meet adequately yearly progress, states were responsible for ensuring that teachers were highly qualified, and paraprofessionals were also held accountable. The inclusion of academic standards were influential in increasing student achievement; however, the implementation had unintended consequences among different states, such as the cost of developing assessments, compliance with testing provisions, larger disparities in public education, requirements for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, the calculation of AYP for students with disabilities, and compliance with ensuring that teachers are highly qualified (Thomas & Brady, 2005). In 2004, NCLB was amended several times, addressing the issues of funding needed to meet the requirements of the act, providing additional
methods of calculating AYP and realistic expectations for students with disabilities and LEP students, and a different way of defining highly qualified teachers, where states were provided more time to meet highly qualified requirements.

More recently, ESEA was reauthorized as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December 2015. Under this ESSA, school districts are given the opportunity to illustrate the progression of student learning. ESSA also attempts to ensure opportunities for all students by holding all students to high academic expectations, preparing students to be college and career ready, increased opportunities to high quality preschool, school improvement, parental awareness of testing and performance, and promoting and investing in local initiatives (www.ed.gov).

The Influence of History, Policy, and Economy on African American Teachers

The historical and political changes in reform aligned to student performance and teacher accountability within urban districts have influenced African American teachers working in such school systems. For example, African American teachers were fired and forced to retrain to demonstrate he or she was qualified to teach immediately following Brown v. Board of Education (Roberts & Andrews, 2013), causing a decline in the population of African American teachers. Being that African American teachers account for only 8% of the teaching population, reforms continue to influence the amount of African Americans choosing to become teachers (Madkins, 2011). The reforms speak to requirements of teaching that are often perceived as barriers of entering the profession of teaching, such as the lack of preparation for many African American college students who attended urban schools, the difficulty of passing the national teachers exam, the addition of different options for professional careers not available in the pass, and the exit
of African American teachers seeking other careers (Madkins, 2011). Such events are critical to the conversations around African American teacher identity, as personal experiences and perspectives influence the development of teacher identity.

Indeed, the limited amount of minorities in education is also attributed to an overall teacher shortage, such as high teacher turnover, low salaries, and student discipline rates, and teacher retention (Ingersoll, 2001). Additionally, the Great Recession has also influenced teacher shortage, as states were provided less per pupil funding for students in kindergarten through grade 12 (Leachman & Mai, 2014). Such funding restrictions limited the amount of teaching opportunities across states (Leachman & Mai, 2014).

Teacher shortage is influenced by various factors and can be observed across different contexts. However, the impact of policy, history, social and economical conditions overtime, has influenced African American teachers in more complex ways. Ingersoll, Merrill, Owens, and Zuckerberg (2017) explore this concern in a report reflecting trends and shifts within data around the teaching force. Through the analysis of data specific to racial and ethnic composition, the population of Black teachers teaching in the U.S. has grown over time. In 1987, there were 197,900 Black teachers employed as elementary or secondary teachers. By 2012, the population of Black teachers had increased to 247,900. Yet, the overall percentage of teachers who were Black decreased from 7.5 percent to 6.4 percent. Furthermore, in 1987, Blacks teachers represented about 5.6 percent of all new elementary and secondary teachers, which increased to 6.7 percent in 2012. Although the population of Black teachers entering the teacher force has grown overtime, the percentage of Black teachers represented in the
total teacher workforce has declined. The analysis of Ingersoll, Merrill, Owens and Zuckerberg (2017) sheds light on a concern specific to the retention of Black teachers, as the data reveals that Blacks are entering the teaching force, but do not remain.

**African American Teachers in Urban Settings**

The current state of urban education, specifically the limited amount of equitable opportunities and the academic status of disadvantaged youth collectively, demonstrate the importance of progressing towards higher expectations in learning for all students. Within urban settings, where the demographics reflect poverty and a high percentage of minority students, teachers are expected to ensure disadvantaged youth meet state and federal guidelines of student achievement. Such a task can be difficult for teachers, as the resources provided to urban settings are insufficient, and teacher autonomy is very limited (Thomas & Brady, 2005). Moreover, as discussed in the research surrounding student achievement among minority students, the approaches to teaching and learning aligned to state standards do not allow for culturally responsive or sustaining teaching strategies that are most influential to minority youth (Gay, 2002; Lee, 2007; Paris & Alim, 2014).

Griffin and Tackie (2016) brings to the light the complexities aligned to African American teacher retention. According their research, Black teachers are expected to not only maintain a positive classroom environment, but are also expected to support other Blacks, who may not be in their classrooms. To this end, Black teachers reported that they believed white colleagues perceived them more as disciplinarians than educators. Such instances cause Black teachers to feel unqualified—unless the students in which they taught were black. Griffin and Tackie (2016) also described Black teachers who felt
devalued among colleagues due to the strategies they utilized or the relationships they developed with students. Their findings speak to research explored by Ingersoll, Merrill, Owens, and Zuckerberg (2017), which suggest that Blacks are interested in becoming educators, but oftentimes experience suppression as a result of the perceived roles and perceptions others have of them. Such expectations and assumptions can influence the retention of Black teachers, and are worth examining. Exploring the ways in which African American teachers working in specific urban settings respond to the current barriers within educational systems, as well as of accountability, autonomy in teaching, approaches to teaching, and how personal and professional experiences influences one’s beliefs, will provide insight on how experiences, policy, context, and history influences the on-going development of the African American teacher.

Participants and Sampling Plan

The participants for this study were middle school or secondary African American teachers with five to 20 years of teaching experience. A total of 6 participants were needed for the first session of individual interviews, which will last approximately 90 minutes. A focus group was utilized for the second round of data collection. A total of 6 to 8 participants were needed for the focus group, which will also last for approximately 90 minutes. Participants who consent to participate in the first round of individual interviews were current African American teachers employed in City B. I have chosen to recruit from City B for the first round, as a result of the closeness in proximity between participants and the researcher. Focus group participants were also recruited from each of the cities within the study (Cities A, B, and C), as to include various perspectives and experiences by context.
African American teachers within this range have already completed resident educator obligations and have experienced a shift in teaching and learning as a result of historical, political, societal changes, as well as educational reform. Additionally, as noted in the research of Marica (1980), Phinney (1989), and Tatum (1997), individual racial and ethnic identity begins during adolescent years. To this end, African American teachers working with urban adolescents were recruited to participate. I have also chosen this range of years of professional experience as a result of findings from Parham (1989), who argues that as a result of life events, adults within the middle adulthood stage begin to align their standard of living to their careers, and become more connected with social institutions. I also draw from the work of Madsen and Mabokela’s (2014), who found that African Americans with five to ten years of experience are more likely to feel as if they are being watched, and as a result, develop coping strategies “to draw upon their identity to provide them with a sense of security” (p. 860). Participants in this study will also vary by content area taught, levels of ability of students, and schools or districts in which they are employed.

The urban settings within this study are categorized by a system of instruction and assessment, implemented by the state’s department of education. Each of the school districts within the state is given a typology number, which classifies the school district by students living in poverty, median income, student poverty level, and percent of minority students (http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Data/Accountability-Resources/Ohio-Report-Cards/Typology-of-Ohio-School-Districts). Furthermore, each of the cities discussed previously (City A, B, and C) are all typology 8 schools, or very high poverty and high student population.
As of 2013, student enrollment for City A is 43,202, the student poverty rate is 100%, and the percent of minority students is 85%. The median income of students attending City A school district is $22,343. Student enrollment for City B is 22,603. The student poverty rate is 85%, and the percent of minority students is 56%. The median income for this school district is $24,324. For City C, student enrollment is 9,750, student poverty rate is 81%, and the percent of minority students is 52%. City C’s median income for the school district is $20,910.

Braun & Clarke (2013) and Crewell (2013) describe multiple purposeful sampling strategies used for qualitative research. For this narrative study, I used multiple methods to recruit participants, who were currently employed in urban districts, have the required teaching experience criteria (5 to 20 years), and were also teaching middle or high school students, at varying ability levels (Creswell, 2013). Recruiting strategies such as fliers, web and social media notices, emails, church announcements or postings, and graduate level education department postings were utilized. Additionally, information regarding opportunities for participation was also distributed to local sororities and fraternities, clubs, and various organizations.

Snowball sampling was also used, which will allowed me to use social networks, participants were asked to pass my name on to potential participants who might be interested in participating in the study (Creswell, 2013). Criterion sampling, or selection based upon criteria, such as years of teaching experience in one of the 3 cities, served well within this study.

Suggested or volunteer potential participants with whom I have a worked with will not be eligible to participate in the study. My current position as an administrator, as
well as my relationships with African American teachers, can create ethical concerns. For example, my personal experiences and perspectives might influence the reconstruction of stories, or African American teachers with whom I work may not feel comfortable fully discussing his or her stories. To this end, potential participants will enter the study having different experiences within Cities A, B, or C.

**The Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative studies, the role of the researcher as the instrument is critical during data collection in establishing reciprocity, trust, and rapport. To begin, I utilized gatekeepers to gain access and rapport (Creswell, 2013). As a doctoral candidate, I was in the position to utilize advisors, professors, and university staff to gain access to potential participants, specifically individuals who I do not know, and who work within different urban context.

As an administrator and former teacher, I have formed various relationships with other teachers, staff, and administrators, who provided information to me for the recruitment of potential participants. Additionally, I have background knowledge of many of the schools in City B. As such, it was possible that potential participants may have some background knowledge of the researcher. This might have interfered with the construction of stories, as potential participants may not have felt fully comfortable with sharing their stories. To this end, it was imperative that I was transparent with the intent and the process of the study. Imperative to this process was the emphasis on the voluntary nature of the research, as well as the option participants were given to stop at any point in time during the study. As the researcher, my attention to the position of myself was critical to the rights of participants, as well as the validity of the study.
Lastly, my own personal experiences as an African American teacher were explored through reflexive writing to demonstrate how such experiences have influenced personal assumptions and beliefs. Such careful study of my own subjectivity as a researcher afforded me the opportunity to expose how personal experiences have influenced my perspective and how my own identity as an African American teacher has shaped my beliefs about teaching and learning. In doing so, I was able to be transparent regarding how subjectivity has influenced my interest in understanding the development of African American teacher identity, as well as how my experiences influenced what I believed regarding the most appropriate ways of educating urban youth.

**Ethical Considerations**

I gained consent from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to carry out research. The IRB application included information pertaining to the rights of the participants and the process of research, including any consent forms.

The details of the IRB outlined the intent of the researcher, the purpose of the study, the rights of the participants, the potential risk of entering the study, the respect for privacy, storage of data, and confidentiality of all participants (Alderson & Morrow, 2005). Participation volunteered and based upon informed consent completed prior to interviewing. The informed consent allowed the researcher to demonstrate responsibility and transparency (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000). Privacy was ensured as all audio files and consent forms were locked and stored in a secure office on the campus of Cleveland State University (CSU). Transcripts were stored in a password secure computer. The details of this process were provided in the IRB.
The role of the researcher in data collection was to establish reciprocity, trust, and rapport. As open-ended questions (Reissman, 2008) and reciprocity that was established through co-construction, rapport was established, as the voices of participants were heard (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000). According to the social constructivist framework, reciprocity is essential for the co-construction of meaning. By exposing subjectivity, and building upon the stories narrated through interviews and activities, the researcher and the participant worked together to restory the experiences (Creswell, 2013; Morrow, 2005). Additionally, reflexivity (Galletta, 2013) allowed for the understanding of personal subjectivity, allowing me to understand how my own personal experiences influenced my assumptions and beliefs (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Finally, the researcher established reciprocity through the iterative process of looping back to interviews and field notes, and seeking clarity and meaning from participants (Galletta, 2013).

The role of the researcher in data analysis was to establish credibility and trustworthiness. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to compare and contrast data across experiences, for deeper analysis. Additionally, I used peer reviews to provide a critical voice and a form of external checking (Creswell, 2013).

In utilizing qualitative research methods, Saldana (2013) and Galletta (2013) note the need for researchers to be reflexive. Galletta (2013) illustrates how interviewing establishes reciprocity and provides opportunities for reflexivity. Through reflection, the researcher is able to understand or question the responses of the participants and the ethical dilemmas associated with interpretation and analysis. Reciprocity between the researcher and participant provides the space for a co-constructed meaning of the experience. The results of this process might provide the researcher the opportunity to
recognize “potential interference,” which could impact interpretations (p. 104). My recorded tensions, positionality, and assumptions, were exposed through the use of analytic memos. This provided a deeper awareness needed for coding (Saldaña, 2013). Furthermore, I needed to loop back to the study and analytic memos to obtain meaning that demonstrated personal subjectivity and participants’ voice.

**Data Collection**

Data collection began once consent was obtained through the IRB. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews. Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher allows the voice of the participant to be heard, demonstrating the complexities within experiences (Creswell, 2013). I chose this method to explore the biographical and professional experiences of African American teachers.

To respect the privacy and confidentiality of each participant, the interviews took place in a reserved conference room, at a local library. Once permission was granted, I recorded the interviews. As a result, I needed to consider the noise level, as well as protecting the participant, by reinforcing privacy and confidentiality. Additionally, I wished to respect the schedule and time of the participants, so meetings were scheduled at times convenient for them.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data for this study. Semi-structured interviews allowed for the participant’s story to unfold, providing the space for further inquiry, clarification, and the generation of meaning (Galletta, 2013, p. 76). As such, the researcher was able to return to different points within the narrative, which is useful for “interpreting data, developing analytical coding, and the restructuring of the conceptual framework” (p. 84). The process of returning back to interviews increased the
accuracy of analysis. Additionally, participants were able to critically reflect and explore his or her “experiences in relation to broader social and systematic patterns” (p. 93). Through critical reflection, reciprocity between the researcher and the participant occurred, allowing for trust between the researcher and participant, and a deeper understanding of individual experiences.

**Interview Question Development**

The interview questions were designed to unpack the experiences related to the biographical and professional experiences of African American teachers. The semi-structured interview questions were open-ended, providing space for participants to retell their stories as experienced (Creswell, 2013). Semi-structured interviews also allowed for flexibility within interviewing, allowing the researcher to prepare for what is not anticipated (Braun, & Clarke, 2013). As a result, the interview questions were constructed so that the researcher understood the impact of the personal experiences of African American teacher participants.

The interview questions were developed as a result of my interest in understanding African American teacher identity. Research shows that family, past learning experiences, community, gender, social class, historical context, and professional experiences influences the identity of teachers (Bukor, 2011). However, was my assumption that race, specifically for the African American teacher, added a layer of complexity not necessarily accounted for within literature and policy. With this in mind, interview questions reflected the opportunity to explore the experiences of African American teachers, which were complicated by a struggle between socialization experiences within teaching and learning, and the assumptions and beliefs developed
through first hand experiences. Critical to unpacking such experiences and the identity of African American teachers, was an understanding of the context and timing of experiences. Closing the achievement gap between minority students and white students has become a focus for national education reform. Included within policy and discussions surrounding academic achievement is the importance of high quality instruction. As such, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act through No Child Left Behind (2001) was developed to improve teacher quality through teacher accountability, calling for teachers to increase student achievement through rigorous instruction based upon teaching standards. Although several studies and researchers argue that teacher knowledge, such as content and subject matter are critical for student achievement, the approaches that highly qualified teachers are provided to teach urban students may or may not align with how students learn. The interview questions were developed under an assumption that both the African American teacher and minority students represent marginalized groups who struggle to combat power and oppression within social institutions. To this end, I developed questions that sought to understand the pedagogical orientations of the African American teachers and how they relate to students within urban settings and former experiences of learning. Additionally, questions developed for the interviews also reflect how specific policies over time have influenced who African American teachers were becoming, as well as his or her beliefs about teaching and learning.

To ensure trustworthiness within interpretation, additional methods of data collection were utilized. First, participants from City B were interviewed individually, for one session. Participants were given transcripts to review as a method of member
checking, which allowed participants to clarify meaning. Secondly, a different set of participants from each city were asked to participate in a focused group, consisting of six people for approximately 90 minutes. The focus group occurred after the first cycle of analysis, allowing for triangulation of the data (Creswell, 2013).

**Data Analysis**

The researcher transcribed all interviews. Each interview was coded and analyzed for emerging themes. The researcher also analyzed the similarities and differences, as well as patterns within participant interviews and across participant’s interviews. Codes were numbered and color-coded, to compare the interviews chronologically and across participants (Creswell, 2013). The researcher compared codes, looking for relationships across codes to form general thematic categories. Each code was defined and noted for repetition, and compared during each cycle of recoding.

The role of coding in qualitative research is essential to understanding themes and categories. Strauss (1987) argues that coding is essential to excellence for qualitative researchers. Additionally, Saldaña (2013, p. 3) suggests that coding should occur in cycles. The coding cycles provide the researcher with opportunities to link the data collected to meaning (Charmaz, 2001). Saldaña (2013) also discusses different methods of coding, and proposes that coding depends on the analytic lens of the researcher. To this end, I argue that my coding process during the first interview might align to a critical race theorist, where codes reflect the values of the participants (p. 7), as well as the social constructivist paradigm, as I was able to look for codes that may appear unexpectedly. Finally, through the process of recoding, the researcher allowed for a deeper analysis of the data, further developing codes, categories, and eventually themes (p. 10).
Creswell (2013) summarizes a process of data analysis and representation from the narrative approach (p. 190-191). The researcher must first make files to sort the data. Memoing must be used to form the first codes, and the data must then be ordered chronologically as it relates to the experiences of the participants. The researcher must then identify “epiphanies” through memo writing, which will guide in organizing the data by codes and themes. Finally, the researcher must interpret the data and present the data as a narrative that reflects the multiple realities and patterns among participant’s stories.

The first cycle of coding consisted of studying the data to see what stands out, specifically looking for patterns and trends (Saldaña, 2013). Memoing was used through the first cycle of coding. The use of analytic memos after coding each interview provided the opportunity to be reflexive and intentional regarding my researcher decisions. The second cycle of coding included looking at the data as it relates to the research questions. Both cycles allowed me to categorize the data based upon consistencies among narratives, as well as how patterns aligned to the research questions (Saldaña, 2013). Additionally, codes were defined and noted for repetition among cycles, within individual and across group interviews. As I progressed through cycles of coding, I clustered the codes by relationships, merged them into categories, and then developed them into themes and broad conceptualizations (Saldaña, 2013; Galletta, 2013). Finally, Braun & Clarke (2013) describe a fifteen-point checklist for data analysis (pp. 96-97). The list consists of a process of transcription, coding, analysis, and an overall written report that provides opportunities for thematic development of analysis.
Confidentiality, Credibility, Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness was established through member checking of transcripts for accuracy of wording in transcripts. I will also utilized reflexivity (Creswell, 2013; Saldaña, 2013) through an iterative process (Galletta, 2013), which will allowed me to prevent potential interference as a result of subjectivity. Other methods to ensure trustworthiness were thick descriptions of the data, member checking, and triangulation through interviews and a focus group. Additionally, I provided detailed information regarding my positionality, and how my experiences influenced my perception and beliefs.

Denzin and Lincoln (2013) describe how qualitative researchers can provide trustworthiness within their research. By establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, the qualitative researcher demonstrates that he or she has considered the validity issues related to qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

Issues of Trustworthiness

The limitation of narrative as a methodology is within representation. Reismann (2008) describes the importance of the investigator in the co-construction of reality. The need to be reflexive and sensitive to the voice of the participant is imperative. However, Clandinin (2007) describes an issue related to “ethical attitudes” in narrative research (p. 538). Here, the researcher must balance protecting the participant from exploitation, while also sustaining the role as a researcher. Clandinin and associates (2007) also confront the difficulties within establishing relationships between the researcher and participants. As such, when the reader is reading the report of the investigator, he or she
is reading the “interpersonal cues” of the researcher. The data is a representation of the investigator’s interpretation, and not the full story of the participant. As a result, Clandinin (2007) suggest that the extent of openness by the participant is critical. Reismann (2008) echoes this argument, as she explores the need for researchers to invite a climate of storytelling. However, such a task can be difficult for researchers.

**Researcher Subjectivity**

My childhood experiences have tremendously influenced my perceptions of school, teaching and learning. Additionally, my experiences as a teacher and adjunct professor have challenged my thinking and teaching approaches, causing me to reflect on my professional dispositions. To this end, my own assumptions regarding teaching and learning, as well as professional experiences have influenced my overall perception, identity, beliefs, and pedagogy. As an African American woman who has been teaching for ten years, my experiences in working within social institutions, and my beliefs based upon being a former student, mother, and community advocate has also influenced my beliefs surrounding the best instructional strategies most appropriate for urban youth.

**Limitations**

Limitations of this study included the sample size, the extent of the experiences of the African American teachers, the diversity among experiences, and having a sample that was not fully representative of the diversity of African American teachers’ experiences. Although qualitative research is designed to explore the individual experiences of participants, a sample size of 12 to 14 participants is a concern for transferability and generalizability. Additionally, the differences by experiences between participants were also a concern, as the range of years of experience covered 15 years.
Moreover, the beliefs and perspectives of participants depended on how the African American teacher identified, and his or her personal and professional experiences. To this end, the breadth of the experiences was difficult to explore. Participants were recruited using the snowball method, which brought about potential participants teaching within similar urban settings. As such, the sample of participants were homogenous (five females and one male in one group, and four males and two females in the other), a concern for demonstrating validity.

Establishing a relationship for narrative inquiry can also be difficult. Fine, Weiss, Weseen, & Wong (2000) describe informed consent as the opportunity for the researcher to illustrate his or her responsibility and position, as well as an opportunity to be transparent, avoiding potential cases of manipulation (pp. 113-114). Even when the researcher is transparent about his or her intentions, potential participants may question the intentions of the researcher.

Reissman (2008) presents four facets of validity concerns related to narrative methodology. The idea of correspondence refers to the consistency of the report to establish historical truth—or how does the account compare to similar accounts? Coherence, persuasion, and presentation address the links or connections between episodes of a story. Also, I used questions pragmatically to get an idea of whether the story is applicable or useful to other studies in the future. Political and ethical use refers to the ability of the story to ignite social change. Each facet of validity allows the researcher to establish trustworthiness when addressed properly. One limitation aligned to this study was the faucet of validity titled pragmatic use. I believe that my limitations
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the on-going development of identity among African American teachers. Additionally, this research project was designed to explore how the beliefs and pedagogy of the teacher are influenced by prior and current, personal and professional experiences. As previously stated, researchers argue that identity is fluid and constantly changing. Identity is also influenced by context, implying that one’s experiences of place and relationships matter to identity development.

Considering the many variables that exist in regards to one’s identity, this study attempts to illustrate the complex ways in which the identity of African American teachers is developed and activated, and how the past experiences of the teacher as an adolescent influences his or her current perspectives and approaches in teaching.

In considering the importance of increasing the population of African American teachers in schools, conversations around teacher preparation and recruitment strategies begin to surface. To engage in such discussions, it is imperative that the identity
development of African American teachers is explored, as the African American teachers’ experiences can be used as reflective training opportunities. Likewise, an analysis of the life biographies of African American teachers is essential in understanding how prior schooling experiences have influenced teacher beliefs regarding teaching and learning, and how such beliefs are manifested within one’s teaching pedagogy.

The research questions for this study is as follows:

How do the biographical and professional experiences of African American teachers influence the ongoing development of identity, beliefs, and pedagogy of African American teachers who teach in urban settings?

Introduction of Themes

It is known that one’s experiences influence identity development. However, identity development is not limited to *only* experiences. Within one’s experience context and interactions with people also influence identity development. The stories shared by participants not only expose the influence of people and context, but they also uncover how other influences, such as race and gender, add to the complexities of identity development. Although the stories described provide a glimpse of the experiences of the participants, the stories also reveal patterns of inequities among schooling and professional experiences.

The defining moments encountered by the participants are retold through reflections on past adolescent schooling occurrences and the experiences the participants describe within their current work environment. Across narratives, reactions and interpretations of the encounters are captured as themes. The themes and subthemes from the collective stories represent common phenomena among participants. The three overarching themes, institutionalized racism interrupting a trajectory of success, the
ongoing development of African American teacher identity, and disrupting institutionalized racism, are discussed below.

**Institutionalized racism interrupting a trajectory of success.** Several of the encounters participants experienced as adolescents were influenced by systematic inequalities. For example, participants discussed the consequences of school closure, hidden racism, and cultural differences. Other instances reflecting inequitable experiences reveal the struggles participants experienced as a result of attending urban schools. Additionally, participants also describe the influence of power and inequality through stories reflecting underachievement and limited engagement.

The educational policies and decisions related to school desegregation and racial equality were intended to provide more equitable learning opportunities among minorities; however, such changes were not able to fully interrupt inequitable learning. Participants’ stories provide an understanding into how educational policy influenced processes of socialization within oppressive systems, as well as the ongoing development of identity, beliefs, and pedagogy among African American participants. To this end, attention to both the interruptive experiences of participants during adolescent years and as current educators allows for a holistic understanding of how past encounters continue to influence participants.

The meaning of interruptive experiences among participants is explored beyond the surface of the incidents of institutional racism in which they describe. This theme reflects encounters experienced by participants in schooling environments, where educational policies were put in place to provide more equitable learning opportunities. However, participants described personal accounts, which were interruptive of fair and
just schooling experiences. The interpretations and confirmations of their teachers, the perception of themselves academically and socially, and how they survived marginalization is critical to our unpacking of how each experience influenced the development of participants as former students and later, as professionals. This exploration into the oppressive structures in place not only serves as an understanding of the foundation of the social reproduction of inequality among urban students, but it also provides insight into methods marginalized individuals employed to persist when their academic paths were interrupted. These personal blueprints for surviving oppressive systems have the potential to support others in their navigation through oppressive systems.

_Institutionalized racism interrupting a trajectory of success_ is the overarching theme used to describe the participants’ experiences within divisive environments as former students, and later as adults. Within this broad theme are two subthemes: _interrupting oppressive systems: the urban school context during adolescence_, which reflects the experiences during the adolescent time period of the participant, and _disrupting institutionalized racism_, which represents the divisive experiences the participants continues to struggle through professionally.

The analysis suggests that within the theme _institutionalized racism interrupting a trajectory of success_ common experiences around racism and marginalization begin to emerge. Participants described how academic and social development was interrupted as a result of inequitable learning experiences. To this end, participants were not provided with learning and social experiences that were needed for academic excellence. Instead, barriers such as racism limited the opportunities of participants. Such limitations existed
within the academic expectations among participants’ former teachers, the academic performance of participants while adolescents and the relationships with former teachers. As the narratives unfolded, evidence of interruptive experiences also appeared within the experiences of participants as professionals, who utilized past schooling experiences to support current urban students. Stories reveal how unjust interruptions happened to participants as adolescence and as a result, have influenced the ways in which participants disrupt the opportunity of similar occurrences among urban youth.

**The ongoing development of African American teacher identity.** The stories told by the participants illustrate how they used personal strategies to navigate through oppressive social institutions as adolescents and now as teachers. What is heard throughout their stories reflects biographical experiences as adolescents and as professionals influencing participants’ identity, beliefs, and pedagogy. Across participants’ stories, the influence of relationships with others proves to be essential to the academic and social development of participants. This theme will be explored through different points within the lives of the participants: as adolescents, and as current educators within a professional urban environment. Moreover, this theme will explore how specific stages and experiences within the lives of participants contribute to his or her holistic identity development.

Unique to the stories of participants are their personal approaches as teachers in building relationships with current urban, minority students, who participants believe share similar experiences. To this end, the subtheme relationships will be explored, as all participants describe how past relationships were influential in developing their teacher beliefs and pedagogy. As the stories illustrate, the foundations of the relationships built
between themselves and their students are as a result of the participants’ interactions with peers, supports the participants received from family, and as a survival strategy, their reflections on the limited relationships or supports received from former teachers.

To fully explore the influence of different groups during participants’ adolescent years, two sub-themes are evident. *Support from friends* unpacks how friendships have helped the participant cope with navigating through oppressive systems. *Support from teachers* will describes how relationships (or lack thereof) with teachers have influenced the learning process of the participant as a student, and the influence of this process as an educator.

An additional sub-theme within relationships but specific to participants’ current professional experiences is also examined. Just as stories illustrate, former experiences are critical to the identity, beliefs, and pedagogy of participants. As a result, the interaction of former schooling experiences with current professional experiences has led participants to become *disrupters*. *Disrupters* is a sub-theme reflective of the various approaches participants use as current educators, such as teaching strategies, pedagogy, and advocating, to disrupt present patterns of social reproduction once experienced by the participant, within the professional working environment. Participants appeared to rely on former experiences aligned to race, culture, and community in order to do the following: develop meaningful relationships with urban students, create authentic learning opportunities, and advocate for urban youth. In other words, participants utilized the interruptive experiences faced during adolescence to later disrupt inequitable learning opportunities as professionals among urban students. Disrupters were able to use personal struggles within oppressive institutions to make authentic learning connections.
and build relationships with their students.

Stories of participants also shed light on the importance of African American teachers who are able to wear many “hats,” which signify their willingness to fulfill many roles in current oppressive schooling context. This ability appears in some ways to be like a sports competition, requiring particular strategies. Wearing many “hats” appeared to be critical to the nurturing of relationships and development of urban students.

The many hats that participants needed to wear will be captured under the subtheme of disrupters, and will be referred to as Hat Game. *Hat Game* unpacks the ways in which race, gender, community, family, and culture, have influenced the teaching approaches and relationships participants have formed with current students. Unpacking *hat game* occurs from two different approaches: a communal perspective and a familial perspective.

The *community hat* reflects the willingness of those participants as professionals to bring to the school in their role as a teacher, to the community. Participants who wear this *community hat* are visible to urban youth within school and in the community, and they hold multiple roles within the community that are not limited to teaching. As a result of the variety of experiences within the community, participants reflect a *community hat* that demonstrates an understanding of the cultural norms and values of urban youth, using such knowledge to empower students.

Participants’ experience demonstrating the ability in their profession to also take on the role of teacher-mother, teacher-father, or teacher-aunt, is explored from the *family hat* perspective. As experiences reveal, participants who wear the family hat take on the role of a parent or close to kin, supporting urban youth in a more nurturing way. Within
the *family hat* role, participants’ experiences illustrate the ways in which gender influences the support provided to urban youth and how white colleagues respond to their roles as professionals.

The family hat theme is teased out through this analysis of gender and race. As participants’ stories suggest, the ways in which participants interpreted interactions and experiences reflect an acknowledgement of the influence of power on race and gender within the professional context. The various experiences shed light on the importance of understanding how one’s identity, beliefs, and approaches are influenced by gender, race, and culture. In the discussion below, the interruptive experiences among teachers as adolescents inform the professional context as narrated by participants.

**Disrupting institutionalized racism.** Within this particular theme, stories around participants’ current struggles or barriers with colleagues, challenges related to teaching and learning, and participants’ narratives of their role as disrupters will be brought to the forefront of discussion. Such experiences revealed how participants responded to the continued inequitable learning opportunities provided to urban youth. Furthermore, participants narrated an awareness of the differences between their beliefs and approaches, as compared to colleagues. Though participants don’t discuss the influence of adjustments, their experiences speak to the supports they believe are necessary. What became clear is how the interruptive experiences of participants as adolescents had influenced their later disruption of inequitable learning opportunities as teachers among current urban youth. Thus, *disrupting institutionalized racism* reflects the ways in which participants continue to disrupt oppressive educational institutions.
“Man, I’m halfway smart!” Although participants act as disrupters for their students, they must also continue to act as disrupters for themselves. Participants described the stereotypes that seem to follow them from adolescence to adulthood around intellectual and professional ability. To this end, a discussion around the ways in which participants attempt to change the perceptions of others is included. *Man I’m halfway smart* involves more than just proving to colleagues and urban students that they are qualified and able to teach; it also involves persuading white colleagues to respect intellectual capacity and ability regardless of gender or race.

**Critiquing the curriculum.** Additionally, *critiquing the curriculum*, a sub-theme that describes how participants adjust teaching approaches to benefit the needs of urban students will be analyzed. Stories discussed within this area will reveal how participants use former experiences and current relationships to engage and support current students through curriculum. The narratives touch on various areas, such as frustrations aligned to testing requirements, teacher self-reflection, and providing students with authentic learning experiences.

**Get that wall up.** For many of the participants, the more they advocate for students, the less likely they had positive relationships with their colleagues. Moreover, many of the participants described feeling devalued or isolated within the professional context. These phenomena will be captured as the sub-theme *get the wall up*, which will explore experiences of isolation and tension within work related experiences, and the different strategies participants used to survive within the professional context.

Across the narratives, there is a common theme of the intersection of race and gender, as the African American teachers in this study recall issues related to identity as
professionals and the perceptions of others. Through their stories, participants revealed how their racial attitudes have shifted over time, and how this shift influenced the current relationships they have with colleagues and students. The stories of participants shed light on the importance of recognizing the ways in which the different components of identity, such as race, gender, or social class, each serve as axes that intersect and produce a complex experience (Collins, 1998). To this end, it is imperative that attention is given first to understanding individual participant experiences and then, second, analyzing experiences across all participants. Attention to these details becomes critical to exploring why participants continue to disrupt, as well as how disruption changes as a professional. Figure 1 is provided to illustrate the organization of the themes.

The study results will reveal how social institutions contribute to patterns of social reproduction, which influenced the identity of participants. Throughout the narratives, the voices reflect the distinct strategies each participant uses to disrupt cycles of social reproduction. A description of participants follows.
Figure 1

Description of Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Code defined</th>
<th>Connection to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalized Racism</td>
<td>Interrupting a Trajectory of Success</td>
<td>1. Interrupting oppressive systems: the urban school context during adolescence (Beginning of Chapter IV)</td>
<td>Describes the participants’ encounters within divisive environments as adolescence, and later as adults; Divisive environments represents the educational institution where political efforts were developed to provide more equitable opportunities; however, an interruptive encounter occurs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Urban context and school closure
2. Urban context and cultural differences
3. Urban context and hidden racism

2. Interrupting oppressive systems: the professional context (End of Chapter IV)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Ongoing Development of African American Teacher Identity</th>
<th>1. Relationships (Adolescent Influences)</th>
<th>Reflects the influence of relationships on participants as adolescents, and how such relationships continue to influence how they teach and what they believe about teaching and learning within an urban context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Support from friends</td>
<td>• Support from teachers</td>
<td>1. Cultural Brokers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expectations</td>
<td>-Of teachers</td>
<td>-Code-switching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Of self</td>
<td>-Of parents</td>
<td>2. Empowerment Agents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Professional Influences)</td>
<td>(Professional Influences)</td>
<td>3. Intersectionality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Disrupters</td>
<td>• Disrupters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Hat Game</td>
<td>-Hat Game</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Community Hat: “Can you hear me sing?”</td>
<td>-Community Hat: “Can you hear me sing?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Cultural Broker</td>
<td>-Cultural Broker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Empowerment Agent</td>
<td>-Empowerment Agent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Family Hat: The intersection of race and gender</td>
<td>-Family Hat: The intersection of race and gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-African American Female Participants: “I can’t wait on nobody’s mama!”</td>
<td>-African American Female Participants: “I can’t wait on nobody’s mama!”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-“Auntie, the mom, sister”</td>
<td>-“Auntie, the mom, sister”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-African American Male Participants: “They want me to go above and beyond”</td>
<td>-African American Male Participants: “They want me to go above and beyond”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Debunking the stereotypes of Black males</td>
<td>-Debunking the stereotypes of Black males</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disrupting Institutionalized Racism</th>
<th>1. Interrupting oppressive systems: the professional context</th>
<th>Describes the participants’ encounters within divisive environments as adolescence, and later as adults; Divisive environments represents the educational institution where political efforts were developed to provide more equitable opportunities; however, an interruptive encounter occurs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-“Man, I’m halfway smart”</td>
<td>-“Man, I’m halfway smart”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Critiquing the curriculum</td>
<td>-Critiquing the curriculum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-“Another test?! I don’t want another test!”</td>
<td>-“Another test?! I don’t want another test!”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Agents of change: “be opposite of what I had experienced”</td>
<td>-Agents of change: “be opposite of what I had experienced”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-“Students must have the truth”</td>
<td>-“Students must have the truth”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Get that wall up&quot;</td>
<td>-Get that wall up&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant Demographics

A total of 6 African American teachers participated in individual interviews. Of the six, one of the participants was male, and the other five were females. Each of the teachers from this sample all taught in City B during the time of the study. Table 1 below provides basic demographical information of participants who were individually interviewed.

Table 1
Individually Interviewed Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Current Grade Teaching</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Current Content Area</th>
<th>Current Professional Context</th>
<th>Racial Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shelley</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Algebra I</td>
<td>STEM</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Science/Math</td>
<td>Urban 98% free lunch</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Math ELA Science</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6, 8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>7, 8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the interview, six teachers participated in a focus group. Of the six, two were women and four were males. Two of the participants taught in a school district within City B, and two different participants taught in the school district of City C. One participant taught in a suburban area no more than five miles outside of City A, while the
rest of the participant sample were teaching in urban schools at the time of this study. Additionally, the participant was the coordinator of an online school, which serviced students eligible for Title I. The table below represents participants of the focus group.

**Table 2**

**Focus Group Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Current Grade Teaching</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Current Content Area</th>
<th>Current Professional Context</th>
<th>Racial Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Todd</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Intervention Specialist: Social Studies</td>
<td>99% African American</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jen</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Coordinates Online Program; Math/Science Focus</td>
<td>Title I program within Suburban District</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Biology, Environmental Science, Human Biology, Forensics</td>
<td>Urban; 90% free/reduced lunch</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timothy</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Urban (lottery pick)</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>12-13</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>Urban: 60-40 (White/Black)</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>Urban: 60-40 (White/Black)</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Description of Themes**

**Institutionalized racism interrupting a trajectory of success.** The theme institutionalized racism a trajectory of success represents the struggles as a result of inequities experienced by the participant as an adolescent and later as an adult. Within
this particular section, interrupting oppressive systems: the urban school context during adolescence is discussed in relationship to adolescent schooling experiences. Just as growth and development occurs through a process, so do the adjustments to oppressive systems occur for the participants in this study. At this point, attention to the divisive encounters participants experienced, as students will be explored. As stories unfold, I will describe the theme disrupting institutionalized racism, which speaks to the connections between the experiences of adolescent and that of adults within inequitable systems and structures.

Like many of their students, the African American teachers who participated in this study are not new to adjusting to oppressive social institutions. For instance, many of the participants describe the struggles they experienced as a result of coping with realities related to inequitable educational opportunities, racial integration, and mobility. Such experiences are important to discuss, as they shed light on the influence of systems and structures upon perception and identity development. Likewise, the barriers that exist as a result of inequitable opportunities unfortunately become similar obstacles many participants must combat as professionals in education. In order to explore how these experiences influence the participant as a teacher, it is imperative to understand how such experiences influenced them as former students.

Although interrupting oppressive systems: the urban school context for adolescents reflects a general assumption of interruptive experiences, the teasing out of this theme across encounters is. Special attention to the individual is made, as each participant described feelings of inadequacy and uneasiness, as they struggled to prove their importance and value among others. These experiences influenced their identity
and beliefs later, as African American teachers. The following sections speak to the themes aligned to the participants’ adolescent schooling experiences.

**Interrupting oppressive systems: the urban context and school closure.**

Shelley’s experience with interruption of her schooling experience came as a result of school closure due to the district’s desegregation plan. She described the differences she noticed culturally and demographically, as she explained how African American students were forced to change schools. Additionally, racism was an obvious form of division that Shelley experienced at school, as she was forced to see herself and other African American peers as unequal to her white peers. Shelley’s reflection of this experience illustrates the unjust circumstances that she and other African American students faced, as they were displaced due to changes within educational policy. Although policies related to school closure are at times developed to provide more equitable opportunities, Shelley’s encounter reveals how she and other African American students went from one inequitable learning environment to another, and were expected to cope with unfair treatment:

They were ordered by court to integrate the schools and so they closed three African-American schools and they bused us to predominantly white school. So you had like three different—I don't know, you had the whites coming together and then you had southwest side come together and west side coming together, so it was a very intense time. It wasn't unusual to come to school and see racial slurs on the building.

It was obvious to Shelley that the racial inequalities contributed to the conflict between black and white students, as the relationships among blacks and whites was very distant and unyielding. However, this tension was not only between white and black students; Shelley also described the uneasiness between blacks. The differences between black communities and cultures became more apparent to Shelley. She explains how the
tension she experienced at school influenced the types of relationships she developed, as Shelley felt protected amongst her own:

> You were like forced to kind of ... you had to stick with your own because everybody was just having conflict. Sometimes you didn't even understand the conflict, you didn't even understand the dynamics of it so you just needed to stick with somebody so you weren't out there on your own, yeah. This would have been 1981. So a lot of fighting between—more fighting between blacks and blacks than the blacks and the whites.”

Shelley’s experience illustrates how unintended consequences of school closure have influenced the relationships among her peers, as she struggled with becoming comfortable with blacks coming from different sides of town. Her interruptive encounter related to school closure exposes the importance of understanding differences by culture.

**Interrupting oppressive systems: the urban context and cultural differences.**

Shelley’s experiences also illustrate the struggles of being a new student, and as her story illustrated, the difficulty of understanding different cultures. As a new student, Shelley was expected to adjust to environments and norms that were very different than what she was used to. Her experiences are somewhat similar to Sharon’s, who also described issues she faced when she moved from the South to the North:

> As a high school student I had culture shock. I was from Georgia where I went to school with all black students, not one white student, so when I moved to Cedar Creek, I attended Hall High School...I went to a high school in Cedar Creek and the majority of the students were white, some blacks, and so I was in culture shock and my high school here in Indiana was a little different, I was not used to going to school with white students and I struggled some.

Sharon demonstrates the need to explore personal experiences, as her concerns with peers were not limited to race. She worked to fit in among a more diverse group of peers who were different than former friends. This adjustment caused division among her and her peers, as she attempted to cope with the newness of her environment.
Oftentimes, such differences meant conflict between Sharon and her peers.

That's what you call it, "culture shock", and it's not even about black and white, it's also about the culture of North versus South, so it took me a very long time to figure out the differences between the two, so I didn't get along with a lot of the kids because of that. It was like my ways as a Southern girl and their ways being Northern people. And a lot of talking, a lot of talking, like they talked a lot when they wanted to fight me for whatever reason. And we down South are not talkers, it's like you fighting or you shutting up so that caused me a lot of problems in school.

Sharon didn’t believe that she fit in with peers from the North. She felt ostracized, as her distinct dialect made her feel uncomfortable, and was noticeable among others. She narrated, “I didn't get along with many people because they were rude and ignorant and they would stare at me a lot, and I didn't know why they were staring at me. And one of them told me that it's because the way I spoke.”

The differences between dialects were bothersome to Sharon. She not only disliked the cultural norms of the North, but she was very disappointed that her teachers did not support her. Sharon believed that her teachers could have eliminated her concerns of speaking different by correcting her:

And the way I spoke was very country, I was very country where I would leave off like the ending of a word and again, my teachers wouldn't care, they wouldn't correct me, they would just call me country and thought it was cute. But as an educator today, I don't think that's cute, I think I should have been corrected.

Karen also faced division among her peers, but from a different angle of isolation. While Sharon battled with acceptance because of her country dialect, Karen was confronted with division because she “spoke white:” “Initially, they thought I spoke differently, I talked funny, 'You talk white,' that kind of thing, I had to deal with that. But then once people realized I was okay, then I was cool.”

In addition to being forced to cope with her peer’s negative response to her style
of speaking, Karen had to prove to her peers that she was worthy of being accepted. Having come from a private school and then attending a public school, fitting in with other African American students was a process that Karen was not used to. She explains her astonishment with her first encounter with attending school with more African Americans:

“And before that I went to a private school, which was all white, all girls in this area. And then I went to public school, because my parents got tuition poor. Three kids in college, and then I was in elementary school. They pulled me and put me into public school, and I was like I'd never been around that many African-American students before. So, I was like, 'What's going on here?'

Sharon and Karen’s experiences show how differences by culture not only exist, but that the differences influence the perception and development of people. Both Sharon and Karen stress the need to fit in. Their reflection on such experiences provides a snapshot of how cultural differences can foster conflict among peers and teachers.

**Interrupting oppressive systems: the urban context and hidden racism.**

Overtime, Karen had no problems with fitting in among peers, as she was involved in multiple extra-curricular activities, such as track and band, and had a host of friends. Ironically, Karen’s barriers around division were more systemic, as she believed her opportunities were purposefully limiting. Even as an adolescent, Karen recognized the various injustices minorities experienced within the public school she attended. She recalled an account where she was reminded of the boundaries in place for African American students, signifying concerns of racism:

And back then, African-Americans weren't in very many honors classes, and in order for you to be in an honors class, they wanted [I] to jump through hoops. But see, my parents were educated, and I was required beforehand, I should have been in those classes, but they wanted to make it a big deal for you to even get in those classes—a lot of underlying racial tension. I mean it wasn't overt, but there were some issues, because you could count the number of African-Americans that were
in the honors classes, maybe three or four in my grade level.

Unfortunately, this was not the only divisive experience for Karen. While hoping to participate in running for student council, Karen was confronted with a barrier that she did not anticipate. Thinking that opportunity was available to all students, Karen quickly realized the limitations and obstacles she faced within a system that was not conducive to her interest and needs:

So, there are just all kinds of things that I was faced with, and I'm like, wow. In a nutshell, they had the meeting during a class when you had a class. They had a meeting ninth period. I had a class ninth period, I wasn't going to skip the class. If I had skipped the class I would have been in trouble. So, that's how you got a package, you got a petition for students to sign your petition for you to run. So, when I went to find out, it was like, 'Oh, it's too late.' So, I came home and told my parents, my parents said, 'That's unacceptable.' So, they called a family friend who was an attorney, next thing you know I have a petition. So, I was able to, and I got the highest votes ever. How ironic. First black on student council ever. So, I stayed on student council tenth, and eleventh, and twelfth grade.

Fortunately for Karen, she had parents who were able to support her in fighting for equal opportunities. Her situation demonstrates how social class and networks, as well as family support, are influential in countering injustices such as discrimination or racism.

**The Ongoing Development of African American Teacher Identity**

In discovering who we are as individuals, conversations around influential people, environments, and circumstances become critical in developing one’s identity. Indeed, identity is shaped by various experiences and variables; however, the complexities of identity development among African American teachers reach beyond dreams and aspirations. Oftentimes, factors influencing the decision of becoming a teacher are not always clear at the time, leading towards a generalized assumption of academic and familial influences. The stories shared by participants reveal how relationships with
others not only influences what they believed about themselves, but also the strategies, beliefs, and approaches they utilized to support student success.

**Relationships.** Relationships matter, and for African American teachers within this study, relationships illustrate the influences of people and interactions. The relationships discussed also demonstrate the support participants needed as adolescents, to navigate through oppressive social institutions, such as school. According to the stories shared by participants, the academic expectations and supports are attributed to the interactions and feedback from former peers, teachers, and parents. Key to comprehending the influence of relationships is an exploration into the people and interactions that mattered to participants most.

**Support from friends.** The friendships that participants developed during adolescence, served as a foundation for support. In fact, for most of the participants, friendships allowed them to feel accepted and valued. Throughout the stories, a clear message speaks to friendships as being a positive influence among participants.

Karen described how important her friendships were to her, explaining that her friends were a priority. Her friendships also reflect how involved and social Karen was as an adolescent:

> It should be academics, but it was friendships. It was friendships. And I valued friendship and being active, because I ran track, student council, I was in the marching band, and the symphonic and concert band. I was a leader, and I was friendly, and my personal beliefs, if you're friendly to people, people will be friendly to you. I had a gregarious personality.

Kim also discussed how important her friends were to her, citing the mutual respect among her friends: “They liked me a lot. They respected the fact, well some of them knew that my dad was a pastor and they expect—they liked the fact that I was a
nice person to them. I guess how I treated them.”

For Kim, respecting others is a personal and family value that becomes evident within her relationships with her friends. She and her friends were determined to support each other in positive ways. They held each other accountable, ensuring that they were successful in school. Although Kim acknowledges that some of the methods her and her peers used to support each other were not always the best, she explains their intentions:

“They pushed me as well, they made sure I wouldn't do anything goofy or anything I shouldn't be doing. They also made sure, and I don't know if I should be saying this, but one time in—not one time, several times in math classes, I would do a section of homework and my friend would do a section of homework, and my other friend would do a section of homework and we would trade, and made sure we—I mean they want to make sure "Hey did you do your homework? Let's do this, this and this." They just wanted to make sure we got it right, we got our grades, and I think that was kind of—I mean not that I didn't know how to do it but they wanted to make sure we got our papers in.”

Kim’s experience speaks to the support of her peers and also the limited amount of time or support she received from her teachers. She was not challenged to learn or apply learning. Rather, she was challenged to complete a task.

The support received from participants’ friends was critical to the development of participants, as many of the participants were forced to cope with the division and tension previously discussed, resulting from such as school closure, cultural differences, hidden racism, and efforts to disprove stereotypes. Such positive relationships were beneficial in supporting the social development of participants, which turned out to be a motivating factor for educational success.

As many of the stories illustrate, the need for positive relationships were imperative to the academic and social development of the participants. Even as adolescents, participants dealt with struggles related to injustices and inequities that they had no control of, and needed support to move beyond the systematic barriers and
obstacles. To this end, relationships and supports from teachers were also critical to
development. We must now turn our attention to the influence of teacher support,
particularly how participants perceived their former teachers, and later, how such
experiences influenced current teacher approaches and beliefs.

Support from teachers. Support from teachers looks different across
participants. For instance, some of the participants describe feeling supported by their
teachers, while others believe that their teachers did not provide adequate support. The
participants who share stories reflective of teacher support have one thing in common—
they both were former student athletes who are now coaches. For Kim and Aaron
(former student athletes), identity as an athlete was beneficial, as Kim and Aaron recalled
positive stories around relationships and supports from their teachers. They describe
teachers who went out of their way to ensure that students were supported as much as
possible, and were successful in school. As explained by Kim, the support she received
from her teachers was noticeable, as she believed teachers made sure student-athletes
were provided with what they needed.

Some of the teachers would make sure, like if I was missing a paper or something or
not on top of whatever, they would make sure that we got it in, "Did you do this? Is
this done? Do you need help with this?" And I feel like that they knew there were
special athletes there and they would help. They would help everybody but they
would help especially the special athletes to make sure they're on top of things.

Aaron echoes Kim’s perception of teachers, but for Aaron, his teachers were more
than just teachers. Aaron’s teachers went above and beyond to show that they cared,
supported, and believed in his talents and ability. He describes this support through
examples he has found in Mr. Roberts and Mr. Smith:

I had some teachers though who were pretty great, and they just so happen to be
ex-athletes and coaches. Like I had a - I still remember his name, his name was
Mr. Roberts, he was a geometry teacher, but he was also the girls' track coach, and every day in his class, he was pushing me. Hey, Aaron, you got to be more than just an athlete. You've got to get this stuff down, because geometry is hard. It's a tough class. But he kept me after class, he was working with me one on one, he was truly going above and beyond to help me.

Aaron and Kim’s experiences with former teachers demonstrate that being supportive means more than just being a teacher. To them, being a supportive teacher means pushing students and expecting more from them. Kim explains how her she knew her former teachers showed support through expectations—although it was not something she always understood. “Teachers were...they were good to us but it just seemed like ...I mean they wanted the best for us but it seemed like they...I don't know, some of them were more like, "This is work. This is what you're going to do." You know what I mean? But you better had it done.”

Both Kim and Aaron believe that their teachers were very influential in ensuring that they made good decisions. Kim attributed her success to the guidance of her teachers noting “I'm sorry if I didn't have teachers like that then they would...I probably maybe would have chose the wrong path maybe to lunch or something and wasn't supposed to and get in trouble, they were right there to make sure we were doing the right things.”

Aaron’s story is similar to Kim’s, as he too is appreciative of the motivation and support his teachers provided him. He explains how his teachers encouraged and empowered him:

Because they pushed me to a point where they said they weren't going to let me give up, or let me be down on myself, or anything like that, and that's something I was really appreciative of. Because I mean it was easy to sometimes get down on yourself, and kind of want to pat yourself on the back, or have somebody else do it, but I really had some teachers who were like, look, the city of Jarretville is not somewhere where you want to be just laying your head down, and just giving up.
You're going to have to fight for whatever you want, especially in schooling, because you know Jarretville was a low-income city all the way around. And there were like, look, if you want to really make it happen here, you're going to have to make it out of Jarretville.

Kim and Aaron’s stories vary from those of other participants and as stated within their narratives, both attribute their success to the teachers who were supportive of personal talents and abilities associated with being student-athletes. Ironically, Kim and Aaron both describe how former coach-teachers have influenced who they become as teachers and how they support relationships and learning among students. They later describe how the approaches utilized by former coach-teachers have influenced the approaches they currently used. However, this type of support was not the same for several participants, illustrating the influence of power created by a system of hierarchy among students. For example, Karen summarizes the types of relationships she had with her teachers. She describes how she knew that her teachers did not care, which was different than Kim and Aaron’s experiences:

I had teachers that were horrible, and you can tell they didn't value kids. And I don't think they liked what they did. I don't think they liked being teachers. So, if you don't like what you do, it shows by how you teach, and how you approach things we you walk in that classroom, you know what I mean?

She recalls a specific incident where a former teacher was very rude to a peer, demonstrating a lack of respect and consideration. Even as an adolescent, Karen knew that how this teacher spoke to her peer was irresponsible and apathetic:

The teachers, they weren't personable, they really didn't care about you as a student. In fact, we had one chemistry teacher who was very intimidating to student, would call out your name and stuff like that. Nowadays, you'd be fired for the stuff he did. I still remember him telling a girl, 'If you spent more time studying chemistry than on your culinary pursuit (because she was chubby), then you might be a good chemistry student.

The remarks made by Karen’s teacher were so profoundly impacted her, that she still
remembers them. Sharon also believed her teachers did not care. She echoes Karen’s assessment of her former teachers inability to be personable with students.

I didn't feel like my teachers really cared and they also tracked me. When I was in school they put me in a program—what do you call it now? Vocational program, and I didn't even ask for it, it was like I was just placed there. It was almost like getting through the day you know, I don't remember any of them correcting me as far as anything, except for behavior. And they'd correct me on behavior but they never corrected me academically or socially.

Sharon admits that for the most part, she did not have positive relationships and supports from her teachers. Yet, she recalls a couple of teachers who did attempt to support her, but she attributes this to the teachers just doing their job. Regardless, Sharon did not believe that her teachers challenged her academically.

Let me see, basically I didn't get along with any of my teachers except for maybe one or two. One kind of...one of my teachers she seemed like she did care a little about me not having kids and things like that, which was a little weird, but to me it showed she cared a little bit. Another teacher she was very nice and helped me out a lot, but that was her job you know, help as far as guiding me in the classroom.

For Sharon, teachers needed to do more than just their job to show that they care about their student’s academic success. Sharon’s analysis of her experiences shows how she recognized that the relationships she formed with her teachers and the learning she was exposed to was not authentic or relevant to her life or aspirations. Shelley; however, adds another layer to consider regarding teacher support. She suggests that because her former teachers were working to navigate through a system, they were more concerned with surviving. Shelley points out that school closure and the challenge of working with minority students was a process that white teachers were struggling to master. Therefore, authentic relationships and relevant learning experiences were not a priority. For Shelley, her teachers were trying to understand their students:

I think about what they were experiencing, and I think they probably were just
trying to survive themselves. Here they had these three cultures coming together in one classroom and just trying to keep ...you know because they still were teaching, but just trying to keep it together, I mean how can you build a relationship when you're just trying to keep it together? Just trying to keep your head above water?

Through reflection, Shelley acknowledged how context, society, and policy influenced her experiences. As stated, Shelley’s white teachers were expected to figure out how to support different groups of African American students that came from three different types of communities. Additionally, Shelley’s teachers were also left to decipher how to continue to educate white students with African American students without any training. Although she realized her former teachers were challenged with supporting racially and culturally diverse students, she does believe that she was able to learn.

Unlike Sharon, Shelley does not discuss impersonal relationships from teachers. Instead, her narrative highlights realistic struggles of white teachers supporting minority students in urban schools:

I do know that they did teach, so I do remember learning, it's no doubt about that, and they had to have given me something because for me to leave there and have to teach myself the things that I was missing, I had to have some...so I think they... I mean they taught, I learned—I can say I did learn. So that's why I have to give the teachers credit because they were teaching, they just didn't teach me everything that I needed.

That she was not prepared for college in the area of math was not immediately evident to Shelley. It wasn’t until she went to college and was forced to reflect on her prior learning experiences that she realized the limited amount of academic depth she was exposed to. This conclusion allowed her to recognize that she had not met her academic potential as an adolescent, and that her teachers had not challenged her academically.

I think they met my expectations at the time, it wasn't until I left that I realized I didn't get all that I should have got. I remember I took calculus, the highest math I could take, and you don't know what you're missing until you leave, and I had
no trigonometry so when I got to college I had to teach myself trigonometry. I remember them treating me fairly, I never felt ...I didn't feel like my teachers were unfair, and I still felt like I got a good education, it's just there were no standards.

The stories around teacher support and relationships reveal several key considerations. First, participants were products of the history, interactions, and environments. The experiences they described reflect their struggles with progressing through encounters and systems, as a result of discrimination, racism, and isolation.

Second, the injustices and lack of supports with navigating through oppressive social institutions led to major academic concerns around underachievement, that influenced participants as professional educators. Below the issue of teacher expectations and expectations on the part of the family are discussed.

Teacher expectations varied. As explored within their stories, the limited amount of relationships established and nurtured among participants’ former teachers and participants during their adolescent years were critical to their academic performance. Unfortunately, most participants did not have the teacher relationships or supports needed to challenge them academically. Although several stories imply that teachers were supportive, most participants shared stories that demonstrate limited achievement and accountability from teachers.

There is a common acknowledgment of participants not working hard academically, as adolescents. For example, Karen, Kim, and Sharon all admit that the effort they put forth in school were just to get by. They were not concerned with high achievement; they were more interested in meeting minimal requirements.

Sharon’s effort was attributed to her belief that her teachers did not care to push her and that she was focused on the easiest way to graduate: “Of myself, I was mediocre;
I didn't care. It was get through school, get it over with. So basically I took classes that were easy, enough for me to pass and get a good grade so I could graduate and my teachers did not care.”

Karen’s academic performance changed as she progressed from middle school to high school, as this was the time where she went from private school to public school. Once in high school, Karen’s academic effort declined. Like Sharon, she became more concerned with just getting by: “Academically, I did just enough to get by. I wasn't a studier. In high school I did just enough to get by, whereas in middle school is when I probably got my best grades, and then when I got to high school it's just like 'Oh, okay. I'm here.”

For Kim, academic achievement was a priority because it was a requirement to play sports. She also admitted that her efforts to achieve academically did not meet her potential. Kim’s effort remained average until she went to college:

I think it was just playing a lot of sports and then just doing what it takes just to get by you know? I didn't want to look like a dummy of course so I made sure that I at least got a C or higher in every class. I was C/B average student. I should have been an A average, I didn't step up to that range until I got to college.

According to Aaron, his academic performance was a combination of personal effort and lack of accountability among his teachers. He was supported to be successful, but he was not pushed to achieve with high expectations, academically.

I remember myself having three or four teacher helper classes, when more than likely I probably should have been in some type of elective class or something like that. You know, I was doing something different. I always took my main courses and things like that, but I think if I was a little bit more in tuned with what I know now, man, I would have been a better student when I started off, when I ended up going to college. High school was great for me. I had a lot of fun as a high school student, but educationally though, I think I probably could have been pushed a little bit more.
Interestingly, participants acknowledged the importance of academic achievement, but did not hold themselves to high academic expectations. Instead, participants’ efforts reflected the effort they received from their teachers: just enough to get by. Yet, the influence of others, such as family is obvious within the ways in which participants reflect on their academic potential. Participants realized they could’ve done better, and for some later in life, they did. Although the academic expectations were not always apparent among participants during their adolescent years, they expressed the high standards expected from their parents.

*High expectations from the family: the parent-teacher disconnect.* Aaron, Kim, Although Aaron, Kim, Karen, and Sharon were able to reflect and understand how much harder they could have worked and the push from teachers that they didn’t receive, they did express the amount of support and the high expectations held by their family.

Aaron knew how much his family believed in him. Unlike most of his teachers, Aaron’s family had high expectations of him and supported his academic success. He did not mention specific ways in which he was to perform academically; instead he recalls the various ways in which his extended family even stepped in to ensure he progressed towards success. To some extent, it did not matter if Aaron’s teachers pushed him, as his family made sure he had their support:

I got to make sure that I'm doing this not only for me, but I'm also doing it for my family at home, because they expect a lot of me, I expect a lot of myself, and then now I've got teachers who are expecting a lot of me, so it almost became that little village circle, where you know everybody's helping out. It didn't matter if I was doing homework at my mom's house, or my uncle's house, or my aunt's house, it was uniform. Same rules apply. You're not going outside until this gets finished. So, it wasn't like, 'I'm a go over here, because I'm a get a little bit of leeway or some slack.' Not like that at all. So, everybody was on the same page. Almost like they had meetings to go, 'Look, when this happens, this is what we're going to do.
Shelley did not discount that friendships were important to her, but she also realized that her family also expected her to be successful in school. As a result, Shelley made sure that she was on the honor roll, and put for the effort she needed to meet the expectations of her family: “The social aspect of it, even though I was a good student, I mean I kept... you know I was always on the honor roll because my family had high expectations of me, and I liked school.”

Karen’s story sheds some light on the difference between families even though there is evidence of family support. Her parents knew that she was not performing academically to the extent that she was able to, but still believed that she would eventually work to her potential:

They knew eventually I would get it together. They knew that I was just finding myself in high school, that I wasn't sailing academically like I should have been. I was reading at four, so why wasn't I a straight A student, you know? You wonder now, was I ADD or ADHD? You wonder? Or maybe I was bored, maybe. And I knew it. And my mother didn't bring that to my attention, or my dad, till after I graduate from undergrad. I was like, 'How come you didn't make me, or punish me?' She said, 'That wasn't the way for me to let you see what was important.' She said, 'I knew you'd figure it out for yourself.'

Raised within a military family, Lisa was expected to do well in school, as she was placed in college courses as an adolescent. However, Lisa’s reflection of her former teacher’s perception of parent involvement captures the assumptions of her teacher. The conclusion the teacher reaches regarding average achieving students not only illustrates the expectations held of her students, it also speaks to how this experiences influences how she supports current students and parents, which will be explored. Here, she discusses a conversation between her teacher and her classmates.

I believe that teacher’s expectations were for me to do well because I was in college prep, I can’t really speak to the kids who were in the basic class because that was not my circle, those were not the classes I was in. I think because I was
in college prep classes the expectation were to perform and to do well. There was
a math teacher who talked to us. He says: “All of your parents will be here” He
said, “Mr. so and so,” (I don’t remember Mr. so and so’s name) “he said he would
be lucky if he gets four or five parents because he teaches basic math. You guys
are in the geometry, the algebra” he said “your parents are going to show up.”

Lisa’s encounter illustrates the systems of hierarchy that exist within schools, as
well as the stereotypes that accompany the perceptions of urban students and parents.
Lisa’s teacher made assumptions about the type of parental support provided to her
peers, inferring that her peer’s parents did not have high expectations because they were
in average courses. His perception reveals an association between average achieving
students and low expectations. However, as many participants explained, the average
effort in which they put forth was not reflective of the high expectations held of their
parents. Therefore for participants, limited parental visibility did not necessarily mean
that parents did not support or hold high expectations of their children.

Although parents and family members expected participants to be successful in
school, meaningful conversations between parents and teachers around achievement did
not occur. Instead, the support provided to participants by parents and teachers occurred
in pockets of isolation, as if parents and teachers were divorced from each other, co-
existing to support the participant. Lisa’s account of her teacher’s perspective highlights
a common assumption among urban school personnel and communities—that parental
involvement among minority students is inconsistent or non-existent.

The analysis of academic expectations of participants’ parents raises the question
about the relationships between participant’s former teachers and their parents,
specifically within urban context. Overall, participants did not mention efforts by former
teachers to include parents in a positive manner. Additionally, participants did not
provide details of most parents being visible or involved within the school. Though
teachers did not consistently support participants, concerns around parent involvement were not discussed. Furthermore, most of participants’ teachers did not expect the minority students to excel academically, which appears to have influenced the expectations participant former teachers held of their parents.

The following section moves into the portion of participants’ narratives that address their experiences as teachers now interacting with their students. It reflects the ways in which participants utilized former interruptive encounters to provide current urban students with supports. The efforts among participants seem to act as preventative methods and strategies to ensure urban youth do not experience the same inequitable and oppressive circumstances faced by participants. To this end, an exploration into the process of African American teacher socialization and professional teacher identity development is explored below.

**Disrupters.** The experiences of participants not only influenced their academic and social development, but also how participants support the needs of current students. The various circumstances, systems, and contexts in which participants were forced to cope and survive, contributed to the types of teachers participants became for their students. Additionally, as a result of injustices participants experienced such as school closure, hidden racism, cultural differences, and stereotypes, participants were able to develop strategies that would enable them to empower their students in resisting patterns of social reproduction of inequality. For this reason, participants are analyzed as disrupters, or African American teachers who utilize past experiences to support the academic development of current students, and at times disrupting the school policies, practices, and social norms to ensure their student’s success. As a disrupter, the
participants assume roles and approaches that are different from those of their teachers when the participants attended high school. Their experience informed them of what their students could become.

As a result of growth and maturation, participants began to internalize the complexities and issues within their own experiences, realizing the importance of assisting urban students. The types of supports participants provided to students are discussed as skills, strategies, and encouragement that transcend beyond the minimal requirements of teaching. One specific skill, which is described below, is captured and described as a natural ability; the ability of participants to be what the student needs. Hat game represents the aptitude of participants, who are able to adapt to the needs of their students.

**Hat game.** The diverse supports needed among urban students were described within stories as approaches needed to empower students. Interestingly, one specific support discussed by participants is their ability to take on different roles. *Hat game* reflects the prowess of the participant to be able to adjust to the needs of students, providing supports specific to the student. At any point in time, and depending on the situation, participants consistently describe supporting students by filling the role of the *person* that the student needs. This ability illustrates participants’ capacity to make transitions between roles seamlessly, demonstrating the ways in which the participant is able to develop relationships. The skills participants have developed over time are attributed to the participant’s past experiences of navigating through oppressed systems.

**The community hat: “can you hear me sing?”** Past experiences were critical in helping participants to understand how imperative it is to support urban youth within and
outside of the classroom. It was common for participants to not only see participants in
the community, but to also support students while they were engaged in community
activities. Throughout stories, participants described how they used adolescent
experiences to assist academic and social development.

Kim motivates students by providing them with guidance that was beneficial to
her as an adolescent. She encourages her students spiritually, illustrating her recognition
of supporting students outside of the scope of being a teacher. The support Kim provides
is reflective of the supports she received from her family, who were known by peers and
community members as church going people. Kim’s advice to students illustrate the
influence of family and her ability to include her student into Kim’s community: “The
one girl that comes to church, she has a lot of problems at home, she comes to school, she
prays every day, things get better okay. I tell her to pray...things get better at home every
time she prays, which is great.”

Karen echoes Kim, as she demonstrates her efforts of supporting students beyond
the classroom. She shows how the ability of wearing different hats or holding different
roles reflects involvement in her student’s lives outside of school. This commitment
brings authenticity to the relationship of Karen and her students:

Okay see, people don't understand teaching goes beyond the four walls, beyond
eight and three. So, I'm the teacher that goes to their basketball games, their
football games, I go to the cheerleading competition, I've gone to kids' churches
even though I have my own church, because someone who's got a solo or
something's like 'Can you come see me sing?' Just little things to make them feel,
'I care about you.'

Karen’s dedication to her students shows that she cares about their interest. This
is ironic, as participants did not recall being supported by teachers in this manner. Karen
uses her role as a teacher to build relationships with students within the context of the
community, allowing students to see her as one of them.

Like Karen, Aaron realized that his students needed to see beyond him as a teacher to make connections and build an environment of trust. He ensured his students were able to understand how his experiences as a student athlete were influential in his academic success and how such experiences has influenced working with urban youth. Aaron noted:

I ended up subbing one day in a classroom for students with behavioral disabilities, and I stayed there for two days, and the principal came down and said, 'Can you please tell me what did you do in this classroom? Because these students were not running up and down the school, none of them left the building, we had to let go of our old teacher who was in here. Can you tell me what you did?' And I told him, I said I was just giving them life stories, and I was telling them about some of my old football stories while I was giving them their work and stuff that was left for them. The way that a lot of the students that I have grew up is the same way I grew up.

Aaron not only used personal stories to build relationships, he also utilized them to engage students and make connections with learning. His past experiences afforded him with the opportunity to bring the community into the classroom and like Karen, allowed students to see him as they see themselves.

Shelley also uses experiences within the community to provide authentic learning to her students. She provides a description of how she connects learning to student experience, adding that minority students need to be able to use prior experience as relevant experiences for learning. Below, she paints a picture of the importance of relating learning to what they know, their community:

So I teach math and science so whatever the subject is I try to relate it to the way they live or where they live, or myself, cause it always helps them to connect the new material, which is objective learning, and I try to do it as often as possible. Or sometimes I might...for example I would try and take the kids out into the community so they can do a hands on or get a mental picture themselves of whatever I'm teaching, of whatever the materials that I'm teaching. I try and take
them into that community. And if it's something I'm not teaching I just take them out in the community just to learn something.

Shelley not only teaches her students the standards expected as prepared within the curriculum, she also develops lessons and problems aligned to the community. This allows for students to apply learning in real-world experiences, a method she was not exposed to.

Sharon concurs that rigor and academics are not enough; students must also be able to utilize their experiences within the community to exist as accepted members of their community. Sharon’s perspective highlights a skill that she suggests her students must possess, as former experiences within various cultures have influenced her beliefs around cultural norms. She argues that her students must be able to function between multiple cultures, a skill that many of her colleagues cannot teach. Sharon’s perception illustrates the need for minority students to be taught how to code-switch, so that they are able to navigate through oppressive systems, yet fit within the culture of their community:

Social skills are so important, like all the way around. A lot of my colleagues disagree with me, but I truly believe that students need to know not only academics, what's in the books, but they need to know the street, they need to know street language or whatever you want to call it, it don't have to be like...it can just be the way of life in the streets versus like in the school. And a lot of people disagree but I don't because our society today is not like it used to be so you can't just teach a student strictly based on what's happening in the books, academic books. If you don't give a little bit of real life, of what's going on in the streets, the kids won't do well because they will be naive within their environment.

Code-switching, or the ability to go back in forth between two different cultures, is reminiscent of Sharon’s own experiences of adapting to the northern cultural norms that she was not use to. As a Southerner, Sharon was forced to figure out how to adjust
to different environments than what she was used to.

Brian, a participant of the focus group in this study, also shared that his colleagues did not understand the culture of his students, which he argued as important in understanding the students. Brian believes that he is able to support students because he knows the culture, has had similar struggles like his students, or knows family members who have had similar struggles. Such similarities allows him to be able to relate to his students:

See we all understand that black kids are used that term "B" and they don't mean nothing disrespectful about it, but that kid got suspended from school simply because the white people around didn't have an understanding that some of the jargon that we use, they just don't get it, they don't have any understanding of it, and I think it's important that they have people that understand some of those situations they come from. I mean you know probably everybody just tell you they got somebody that's sitting in prison for whatever reason. White people can't really understand that, they don't understand people that came from impoverished situations, they do what they have to do to get by.

Not only can Brian relate to his students, but he also understands the cultural norms in which they abide. As a result, he is able to mediate situations and act as a support for urban students, as he is more understanding of what they are going to. He attributes this understanding to the knowledge he has obtained as a black man who has had similar experiences within similar context of his students. Brian believes that this is an ability whites cannot relate to. His conclusion suggest that he believes that whites can not speak to the struggles of him or his students, as they did not have to survive the same inequitable circumstances.

Switching hats is not only an art that participants have come to understand through experiences, it is also a form of support that is aligned to gender and race. Participants narrate gender influences in terms of what hat is worn, as they take on roles
other than a teacher, to disrupt the inequitable learning experiences of their students. The following section explores how African American female and male teachers disrupt the unjust circumstances of urban students in gendered ways. It also illustrates the ability of participants to not only switch hats, (i.e. the community hat to the family hat), but it also demonstrates the skills and knowledge participants have mastered to make such smooth transitions.

**The family hat: “I can’t wait on nobody’s mama.”** Across participant’s stories, dialogue around family support revealed a disconnection between participants’ parents and former teachers. Participants recalled the high academic expectations of parents or other family members, yet, they also believed this was not the same type of expectations or support provided by their teachers. As indicated within the reflections of Sharon, Lisa and Karen, many parents were not involved in conversations with teachers around the academic success and future of their children.

As a result of her experience with her geometry teacher, Lisa had developed empathy for her current students and families. Recalling her teacher’s assumptions about parental involvement among her peers, Lisa acknowledges that parents may not always be visible. Regardless, she contends that she must continue to support her students. She shares her perception regarding her role with supporting students as something that has to be done—with or without the parent. She believes that parental and family involvement is helpful, but that she must continue to do what she can to support student achievement. For Lisa, the support she provides her students are in place regardless of parent or family involvement:

One of the things that I’ve come to realize is that and it, and it upsets me when teachers, other teachers have not come to that realization—and that is when they
talk about the parent component. I would love to have the parent component. I would love to have more parents involved, but I had to come to a conclusion, and that was when I was at one school I was at for those eleven years (which it helped that we had an excellent staff, and we were the best you know). I had to come to the realization that whether a parent showed up or not, what was my responsibility? I couldn’t wait on parents, I couldn’t. I can’t wait on nobody’s mama, I had to come to that realization of what am I going to do if she never shows up? What’s my responsibility if she never shows up?

Lisa described a concern that is specific to urban context—the limited amount of parental involvement. However, Lisa believes it is her duty to do whatever she needs to be done to support her students. Unlike her colleagues, Lisa does not wait for student’s parents to show up. Instead, she becomes the support, the disrupter, advocating and educating students as if the parent was involved. To this end, she becomes the parent, acting and thinking in ways she believes is best for the student.

Stories reveal that most participants do not “wait on nobody’s mama.” For participants, their ability to disrupt inequitable encounters among urban students includes knowing which hat to wear during specific times. Participants are able to play the role needed that is not limited to being an educator, or a local community and mentor, but also includes the ability to take on the role as a parent or family member—acting on care and advocacy.

The types of familial support that participants provided were not only influenced by race, but were also influenced by gender. Within the stories, common threads among African American female reflect an understanding of culture and the ability to nurture students in a loving way. Therefore, the types of relationship that African American women participants were able develop are authentic, empowering, and supportive of disrupting systemic barriers.

The African American male participants also take on a familial role, oftentimes
being seen or referred to as a father or uncle. Taking on such roles implied that male participants became providers, giving support that encompassed more than help with schoolwork. Male participants offered urban youth with help that was imperative for success throughout life. The ways in which male and female participants utilized familial hats to disrupt unjust learning experiences are discussed below.

*The family hat: “auntie, the mom, the sister.”* Lisa sets the stage for understanding the support that she and other female participants provided to students. As African American women educators, the participants described taking on the role of an aunt, mother, or sister, to disrupt the inequitable experiences that result from being educated within oppressive social institutions. By providing urban students with nurturing support, female participants were able to develop authentic relationships with students.

Karen provides a brief explanation of how she uses her natural ability of switching hats to support her students. Even though she is able to switch hats, she states that she is always wearing her motivating hat, suggesting that she is constantly encouraging her students. Yet, Karen acknowledges that encouragement is not enough. As an African American woman educator, Karen believes her students also need to be cared for, just a mother would:

I think as an educator, you wear different hats throughout the day. Sometimes I'm their counselor, sometimes I'm the mom, sometimes I'm their pastor or whatever, sometimes I'm the nurse, sometimes I'm their psychologist. So, you know, it's learning to put on those hats at the appropriate times, and I wear my motivating hat all of the time. I think my experiences as an African-American woman period, because African-American teachers definitely have that mom role, like I said, those different hats I wear, and that's definitely an African-American thing.

Karen describes what other participants reveal: that participants become the
support they received from their families. She explains how she is able to encourage
students, the same way her family supported her. As a result, the many hats or roles she
filled reflected the ways in which Karen uses her experiences to support urban youth.
Additionally, Karen suggests this ability to be “an African-American thing,” inferring
that the skills and knowledge needed to transition into various roles is attributed to race.
Her conclusion aligns to the ability of participants to use code switching as a way of
bringing the community and family to students.

Jen, a focus group participant, also describes how students relate to her as kin, or
being a part of the family. Like Karen, Jen attributes this family-like relationship to a
cultural connection between her and the students. For Jen, she not only realizes how her
students perceive her, but she also embodies the role of being a mother or aunt, as she is
protective of her students, similar to how mothers or aunts would be: “I find that most of
my students that I worked with I ended up becoming Ma or Auntie, so I think it's an
unspoken cultural familial type of significance to have African-American teachers. In all
honesty I find myself being protective, hovering, blocking, covering.”

Sharon shares Karen’s analysis of the roles she assumes to support her students.
Sharon suggests that this ability to become the aunt or mother is what students need, as
the role of being an educator is not enough. Interestingly, Sharon believes that she works
better with kids when she is able to wear the family hat. Like Karen, her comfort within
this role illustrates her close connection with the culture of her students, as well as the
similar experiences she shares with her students. Sharon’s relationships with her students
are authentic, demonstrating her ability to combine community, culture, and family to
support her students:
You know, I try to be a role model to the kids, and I hate to say this, but to the minority kids, I try to be a role model, but more so...and this is just me, I try to be the aunt, the aunty, the mom, the sister. I take on all those roles because that's what they need, when I just stay in that teacher role...excuse me, I just feel like I'm not successful with my students. But when I turn into the other roles, like I said in the family, I do so much better with the kids.

Like her students, Sharon seems to have found a safe place though the embracement of the family hat. As an educator, aunt, mom, sister, and community member Sharon not only supported students academically and socially, but also provided her with a sense of belonging within her classroom.

*The family hat: “they want me to go above and beyond.”* Male participants speak to what they believed to be the supports students need, as well as the perceptions of what parents expected of them. Brian expressed the expectations parents and community members have of him, putting on the necessary hats to support students. His perception speaks to a consistent concern among urban schools and communities: a lack of resources among families, communities and school districts.

“In terms of the parents' perception of what I should be doing as a educator, they want me to go above and beyond the duties of teaching like go into the financial realm, be their dad, uncle, whatever you need to be for them to be successful. That's what a lot of parents expect of me being a black male.”

Brian specifically speaks to expectations and his role as a Black male educator. He concludes that he is expected to do and be whatever his students need him to be to be successful, similar to the role of what fathers are expected to do. The ability of Brian to fulfill the role in which students need, highlights the skills and knowledge needed of Brian. Moreover, it requires Brian to develop relationships with students *and* parents, as to know which form of support is needed.

Brian captures the expectations of parents and community members in his
reflection of his experiences:

I really believe that where we are they expect us to be the father of every young black man there, only because most of the young black men don't have their dads around so it goes way past I think just being their classroom teacher. It's a lot of mentoring involved there, it's a lot of driving guys to college, making sure to get there, making sure they got...here I want to read a text message for you guys that I just got from a kid, and I really don't even think the kid sent it, I think his mother sent this right here, but I really believe that they want us to be...he says, "I'm leaving for college on Tuesday the ninth, I need stuff for my dorm room, hygiene, school supplies, underwear, microwavable food. I have a refrigerator and microwave, if you could help out with that, anything would be great.

Brian believes that the various hats he wears are reflective of racial and cultural concerns. Due to his involvement in the community and his own experiences of navigating through oppressive systems, Brian understands that urban students need more than just a teacher. He becomes the bridge that disrupts unfair circumstances students face, and at times, supports students when their parents cannot. Brian’s role as a father or provider demonstrates the physical and emotional support he gives to his students. Such supports are necessary for urban youth, who do not always have the resources needed to empower themselves.

“Debunking the stereotypes of Black males.” The male participants revealed concerns around the perceptions of African Americans. As African American men, participants embraced the role as the leader and provider, taking ownership of debunking the stereotypes of dominant society. Brian argues that African American male teachers are not only needed, but are essential in changing the perceptions of African American. Brian’s explanation speaks to issues that are culturally aligned. He contends that African American teachers must have a certain level of finesse, experience, and credibility so that students might consider looking at their fellow African Americans and themselves in a constricted fashion:
I just think it's important that the African-American student has a person that they can look at on a daily basis that looks like them, someone that is a walking, talking, moving, example of really what a good black man's supposed to be like, because really when you look at some of the kids that I work with, and I've had kids that I've mentored, taught for four years, I've never met their dad. So they really don't have that relationship with a black man that they're supposed to have, and I just think it's important that they can come in and see me on an everyday basis, clean-cut, dressed the right way, talking the right way and giving them the real. Somebody that's going to keep it real with them, someone that has had a lot of success.

Brian believes that students may not have enough images of African Americans that are associated with educational success. Brian hopes that his role as an African American teacher allows for students to see that their own personal assumptions about Black males are not always facts. He shows how he uses his position to counter the stereotypes of society, as well as those held of other African American students:

Mine, it's important because of perception of the black male. I had an experience this past year where we have a co-teaching setting and my co-teacher was white and the students have this perception that my co-teacher knew more than I knew. But I feel like that's talk and I feel like it's important to have African-American teachers because the kids need to understand that people to look like them are smart. And then also too I grew up being ... you know teaching in the neighborhood I grew up in. I grew up with a lot of the kids’ parents, so I'm teaching the people that I grew up with, I'm teaching their kids. So it's like "Well my dad acts like this," or "My dad is in jail." So it's like since you was his boy, it's that perception. And just to try to more debunk the stereotype that you have of yourself.

Timothy suggests that because his students also make assumptions regarding the identity of African American males and females, they oftentimes do not realize that being black is self-defined, and should not be limited to the assumptions of media, or restricted to collective experiences. He discusses this struggle below:

I can tell you right now that I shock black students. I shock black students because they don't know quite how to take me. I get into the classroom, number one, they're shocked to have a black male teacher because most of them have never really had a black male teacher, even just a male teacher period. So by the time fifth and sixth grade comes, they have their image of what a black male is
supposed to be, whether they have a dad or not, or whether they have an uncle. And we all know where these images come from, they come from the music that they listen to, they come from what they see on television, and so when they see me they're shocked.

For Timothy, much of his time with forming relationships with students came with intentional efforts of changing the perception of how students see black males, and how they see themselves.

Ken also described the stereotypes of black males, which stemmed from images and stories limited to dominant society. As a result, Ken believes African American students struggle with understanding themselves racially, as their identity is oftentimes defined for them:

I think the students' main barrier is many of the students don't have access to black men, that's one of the main barriers. I think another one is that many of my students, especially male students, are finding their definitions of what it is to be a black male from the media, that's another barrier. I think the definition of... and I mentioned this earlier ...the definition of what it means to be black is mixed up with by many students the definition of what a nigger is. And frankly speaking I have to talk to my students about their complexion is not nigger, that being a black man and being a nigger are two different things, and I have to pull them aside to do this, which is one of my barriers. I can't say what I want to say to students, at times that I want to say it students especially in the middle of the classroom. You can't get on a black parent level with black students when you have onlookers because that would be misread, it would be misunderstood by others who don't understand what's going on.

Ken revealed the complexities within racial and cultural identity, as well as within dominant societal acceptance. Although he acknowledged the need to code-switch, or going back and forth between cultures for his students, he also suggested the need of African Americans to remind themselves of the norms of dominant society. To this end, participants had to strategically find places and moments to disrupt the oppressive experiences of urban students, while also acknowledging the cultural rule of dominant
society.

**Disrupting Institutionalized Racism**

The narratives represented in this study explicate the need to pay close attention to individual experiences within the professional context. The accounts of each experience allow one to understand that experiences among participants are not only attributed to race, but also to the struggles of being a minority. The stories highlight the need to recognize how differences between time, context, policy, family, and education has influenced the development, beliefs, and approaches of the participants as professionals. How participants were able to *and* continue to navigate through such oppressive systems with limited supports and opportunities remains a challenge. Their interpretation of their experiences and the strategies they employ to support current students, reveals the complexities aligned to balancing identity and culture as well as the injustices each participant experiences as it relates to race, gender, and class.

The following encounters explored the struggles of participants as they attempt to gain respect as professionals among colleagues and among society. Participants described the ways that they counter perceptions and assumptions aligned to their intellectual and professional abilities.

*“Man I’m halfway smart!”* Todd is focused on changing the stereotypes of African Americans. He argues that seeing African Americans as educators, allows students to realize that their intellectual ability is just as important as the athletic or entertaining abilities the media has restricted African Americans to. For Todd, he values how students see him, and embraces the perception of *being smart*:

So it's like it's important to have African-American teachers in the classroom just so kids can identify and understand that they are just as smart as any other culture
because that's the perception you get on TV. I tell the kids all the time every time you get an African-American show it's always some type of comedy. We do way more than make people laugh, but all the things that are pushed on them through media and things of that sort. They think the only way they can make it out is do athletics, which I was blessed, but that was the only way I thought I could make it out until I got to my junior year in college and I'm like "Man you know I'm half way smart." I got the highest GPA on the team out of everybody, you know I came to college to play basketball. So you know it was just to more dispel some of those myths and stuff that a lot of kids have of themselves I think is important to have African-American teachers.

Like Aaron and Kim, Todd’s identity as an athlete proceeded his ability as a student. He emphasizes the need for African American students to see themselves beyond the boundaries of entertainment set by dominant society. Todd argues that African American within the roles of educators allows for African American youth to see themselves differently.

Sandra shares that African American teachers are not only additional opportunities to see other African Americans in a positive light, but African American teachers are also in a position to mentor students, who may share similar experiences. When African American teachers are able to share personal stories, they are able to provide students with supports not afforded to them within schooling curriculum or norms. Such supports are necessary for minority students to navigate through oppressive institutions:

Depending on where you work, if you're working in where you have a lot of African-Americans so they can have someone to look up to that's a positive image because so many kids, the images that they're getting are just not positive at all on TV and radio, and things like that. So I just think that's important to have someone there to mentor, that they can talk to that possibly have experiences like them, not always but even just to look like them, someone they can trust to help get them through.

Sharon’s experiences illustrate how perceptions influenced the beliefs and interactions of her colleagues. She described the tension between her and a colleague,
who did not value her abilities as a professional. Unfortunately, having to adjust to unfair conditions is not new to her. She also experienced similar experiences with oppression as an adolescent. For Sharon, just as she was not held to high academic expectations as a student, as a professional, her colleagues also do not have high expectations of her or her abilities:

When I'm in a co-teaching situation I feel like, related to my race I feel like I'm the assistant in the classroom. I don't feel like I'm treated like it, let's put it like that, until I have to nip it in the bud. So I'm not treated as another colleague, I'm treated as if I'm working for that general-ed teacher. Just the way that persons talks to me, like for example, "I need you to make so and so copies," or "I need you to do this." There's no collaboration, there's no, "What're we going to do together?" Or "Let's sit down and discuss your role in the classroom versus my role in the classroom and responsibilities." Like that don't happen. What happens is when we start teaching I'm actually often requested to do certain things, and that's not a lead person in the classroom, or an equal person in the classroom. So to me I'm treated...that's how I talk to my assistant, like "This is what I need," cause that's that person's job, to assist.

**Critiquing the curriculum.** Through their stories, participants make it apparent that there is a need to supplement or modify the curriculum, as to make it more meaningful and relevant for their students. For reasons that are attributed to personal schooling experiences or even due to professional experiences, participants have developed methods and strategies to support student achievement. An exploration into how participants utilized such experiences is presented below. Each story is specific to the participant and may also reflect commonalities across experiences.

Throughout narratives, a common thread related to gaps within schooling experiences are generalized as systematic barriers and limited supports. As a result of the diverse experiences of participants and their efforts of coping with such inequitable circumstances, participants have developed strategies to support students in ways that participants were not. Additionally, participants provided supports that reflective of a
similar struggle among participants and their current students: working through oppression.

Although time, context, and policy has changed for participants and their current students, sustainment and reaching success within an oppressive systems, continue to present barriers related to inequalities and injustices. Participant stories and experiences revealed levels of resistance, which were connected to their current teaching beliefs and approaches. As such, the strategies they have gained throughout the process of resistance are shared as tools to enhance and support student success and achievement among urban youth.

Participants in this study recognized the current pressures associated with federal and state policy. The stories explored the influence of political decisions, as educational policy requirements continued to influence teaching and learning, within student assessment and achievement, and teacher accountability. Participants described the academic and teacher accountability requirements of the state, and how such requirements are detrimental to the development of students. Their encounters are described below.

“Another test? I don’t want another test!” Lisa felt restricted as a result of testing obligations. She described the limitations associated with teacher autonomy and also brought up concerns around testing fatigue among her students. For Lisa, the amount of time she spent on testing takes away from time she could have been creative with learning. Furthermore, Lisa found that students are not as engaged, as lessons and activities that are of interest to her students were not able be implemented. As such, Lisa to agreed with her students, that there is too much testing:
Our hands are tied a little bit because we have so much testing and when the kids fall on the desk and say “another test, I don’t want another test!” I said, I would much rather be teaching. So we are kind of restricted about that a little bit that there are certain things that we don’t have time to do because of all the testing, we test… when we come in the door we test in December, comes spring we do state test and then that test that we took in September, we have to take again in May and sometimes things that you like to do on your computer or whatever because we are limited by that. Testing is a constraint that you have to teach what you need to teach which I am not saying that we are not but it keeps you sometime from doing the fun stuff, the little things that will make it fun because you just don’t have the time and it’s like okay this is a stuff we have to do because we are testing on this thing.

Kim also expressed feelings of empathy for her students influenced by testing decisions and requirements. Kim was not able to make connections with her content area and the content of state testing. To this end, Kim attempted to provide students with anything that she could to support them with studying and test preparation. Like other participants, Kim tried to do all that she could to support the success of her students: “It's just ... the state test seems like it's the hardest thing for them to get through. So with that being said I try to just give them little things even though I'm not there teaching that part of it, I'm trying to give them things to look up and do to make them better for the test, to past the test.”

Kim is not only disappointed in how state testing influences the outcomes of her students, she is also very disappointed with the implications state requirements have around teacher preparation and ability, specifically her own. Kim describes feeling disrespected as a professional, especially since the road towards achievement and becoming an educator was different for her. Her reflections speaks to a disconnect between policy makers and educators:

These tests that they're giving the kids. I think that... I mean I'm telling on myself but I think they're kind of too much. Too much for them, a lot of kids aren't graduating because of it. I feel like we went through and got our education and
even got our Master's and we still have to give them a different type of test in order for them to graduate, and I feel like that's not fair to us, it's like a slap in our face, like you're not teaching.

Sharon shares similar beliefs as Lisa regarding the amount of time she must spend focusing on a test. She explains how she begins to question the toll testing takes on her student’s ability to achieve. Sharon describes her feelings around state testing and concludes that students are not necessarily learning. Ironically, Sharon’s conclusion around standardized testing contradicts the logic behind standards. For Sharon, students are only learning to regurgitate information. They are not learning how to apply the information learned to real-world context:

I just believe that the assessments, all the different assessments we have it takes over literally the entire school year. I think we counted...at one of my workshops we counted, I want to say 30 something assessments and that was including teacher assessments. So if you break down the school year and you add in those assessments the first 10 days that you teach and then the curriculum assessments, that's like overwhelming, that is so overwhelming to the point where the kids are not learning to learn so when they leave school they have learnt something to keep in their folders and their brains, they have learned basically to take tests.

As Sharon points out, the time dedicated to test preparation and testing is both a priority and a nuisance for participants. Additionally, participants contend that efforts to support students through this process are difficult, as student achievement and graduation requirements are aligned to state test. Mediating between the restrictions of state testing, test preparation, and student achievement has trickled down to the participant’s ability to utilize creativity and teacher autonomy. The ability of the participant to combine personal experiences, creativity, high expectations, and supports aligned to specific student needs are captured in their descriptions of the teaching approaches used to adjust the curriculum. To some extent, such approaches are different than what is intended by districts or within the curriculum provided to teachers. For participants, the adjustments
made are specific to the needs of their students and are oftentimes outside of the boundaries of curriculum. The efforts of participants to utilize curriculum and teaching approaches to disrupt the circumstances of urban youth are captured below.

Agents of change: “be the opposite of what I had experienced.” That participants reported that former teachers did not challenge them has had a tremendous influence on the expectations held among current students. Ken discusses his efforts in relation to the teacher he didn’t have, committing himself to becoming the teacher his students need, as a source of empowerment and positivity:

I knew that I needed to have an impact in the classroom and I knew that I wanted to be the opposite of what I had experienced. And so I knew that teachers had a way of dealing with African-American males and females too that was unbecoming, and so I said that I need to be a counter-availing force...a counter-active force in my environment.

Shelley expresses her concern around providing equitable learning opportunities for students. Due to past experiences with teachers who did not utilize standards, she realized the importance of having high standards and expectations for her students. However, she acknowledges what several other participants have described: that standard-based teaching and assessment is somewhat of a barrier for teachers: “I think standards helped just provide some equality, and without it you'll get whatever that person wants to give you. I think standards get a bad rap. I think you can still be creative with standards, so even now with me I have my standards but I'm trying to... the creative part is how I teach the standards.”

In addition to standards, Shelley understood that in order to challenge her students and provide more equitable learning experiences, she needed to adjust her teaching approaches. Shelley always believed that students needed to be critical thinkers. To
support students, she adjusted what she was doing in the classroom to ensure she was stretching students to be academic achievers and problem solvers:

I kind of changed my approach more, I'm trying to do more of the Socratic method in that I'm kind of stepping back and letting them take more charge of the class. I'm trying to make them creative problem solvers. And so we market creativity because that's a 21st Century skill, they need that, and I mean the problem solving. The math isn't—you know the math is one vehicle to the problem solving, but it's all these other things that when they make the connections and they see different things from a different lane, that's what helps them become better problem solvers.

Shelley realized that the more she pushed her students to dive deeper into learning, the more that she needed to invest time into planning and personal learning.

Shelley’s reflection reveals that like her students, she too is a lifelong learner, one who is willing to explore other approaches to ensure students were truly learning:

It was called Meaningful Math and it's what I use now, and and basically it was an inquiry-based mathematics program, and it taught me how to teach inquiry-based in my classroom. In order to do that it's so heavy, the lessons were really heavy, so much so that some of the other teachers they were like: I'm not doing this. But see I had a math...I mean a secondary math degree, so that's the difference between somebody like me with a high school math degree and somebody who doesn't have that. But if you haven't had that, you can't reach like that. So that was the difference, when we started using that curriculum and I saw the effects, the deeper problem solving that that curriculum was helping the kids with, and it was helping me think deeper, and it was helping the kids think deeper. But that's when I made the change to understand that the traditional text was not going to help that deeper problem solving with the kids. I'm trying to do more of the Socratic method in that I'm kind of stepping back and letting them take more charge of the class.

As a result of her experiences of limited rigorous content, Shelley opts to spend time in her content, trying to ensure that she is challenging current students to be able to critically and independently think. Her efforts are aligned to providing students with the supports that she did not receive as well as what she believes is beneficial for student achievement.
I think they need to be able to learn in different ways, at different paces, which is really hard for a teacher to do, which is why I'm working till 9:00/10:00 o'clock at night. Most people are not going to do that, but that's what it requires in order to differentiate that instruction for them. I believe all students can learn, I don't believe that everybody's going to learn the exact same thing. Everybody is not going to end up in the same place. Some people may get three quarters of the way, some people may get a hundred percent, some people may go beyond that, and I think the way that they learn it's important, the inquiry-based learning is really important.

As participant’s stories revealed, a change in the approaches of teaching and learning are critical in supporting academic success among minority students. Much of this change is attributed to the limited amount of connections that students can make that are relevant to their current lives and future. The limited amount of perspectives within curriculum prevents the creativity of teachers. To this end, participants expressed concerns around authenticity, biasness, and diversity, which are essential to the knowledge and experiences of educators. Encounters of participants and the efforts to disrupt social reproduction with social institutions are presented in the following section.

“Students must have the truth!” Ken also recognized the biased perspectives offered to his students by his district. He decided to go against the grain, knowing this could mean leaving his position as a teacher within the district. Ken took it upon himself to enlighten his students about what he called truths. He believes that African-American students need to be exposed to curriculum that embodies history and knowledge reflective of multiple perspectives and experiences. According to Ken, it is important that African American students are exposed to their own history, as well as those of others. Ken’s personal response to the systems in place within the oppressive institution in which he works is describes his intentions:

And so I knew that what I wanted to be was a force for classroom content and curriculum, truth needed to be taught, it needed to be taught in a balanced way,
they needed to understand truth that would end up out of the school district, and I said that I will do this if the district is with it, then great; if they're not with it then my stay won't be long, you know what I mean, but the students must have truth; they must have a content in terms of a presence that you all mentioned around this table, but an energy like the African-American church experience is different in most cases than a Caucasian church, not in all cases now with the mega churches and the advent of more racially-mixed congregations, but they need to be able to feel that energy and identify with that.

Ken believes that African American students will be more engaged in learning if they were exposed to curriculum that was more truthful. He compares student engagement to that of an experience within an African American church, where the energy aligned with experience offers opportunities of active participation. Furthermore, exposure to unbiased curriculum provides students with the opportunity to interrogate what is perceived to be truths, which affords students with the opportunity to critically think. He suggests that the cultural bias within the curriculum prevents students from obtaining knowledge from other minority experiences. Also, Ken describes how the curriculum can restrict teaching and learning, as he finds ways to include oppressive voices among diverse groups of minorities, from the lens of multiple disciplines.

I think the barriers that students have primarily are information barriers. Significant academic learning gaps often times are in place, and then there are cultural learning gaps. How do I proceed to accomplish XY and Z goal in the language at the discipline that I'm in, with the soft skills necessary to navigate various types of terrain, you know what I mean? And so while I'm being me and I'm helping the seniors to see themselves in the curriculum, oftentimes professionals in the district and in the environment can't comprehend that and they will see it as teaching African-American studies, which I do teach African-American studies; however African-American Studies is in every lesson that I'm going to teach, if there's African-American students in the class. Just like I incorporate women's studies, when I have my Latino students I incorporate that; I'm going to make sure LGBTQ, I'm incorporating that.

Lisa also understands that diverse perspectives matter. As a result of her experiences growing up, Lisa values the influence others from different cultures has had
on the person she is not, so much so that she wants similar experiences for her students.

Not surprisingly, Lisa also believes diversity is not appreciated or valued by curriculum and testing developers. She expresses her concerns around biased testing and curriculum, and how the district in which she teaches does not consider the diverse perspectives and experiences of others. Her conclusion demonstrates the barriers within testing and learning within oppressive social institutions. For Lisa, not only are urban students unable to think critically due to limited perspectives; they also may not be able to link prior knowledge to learning. Realizing that minority students are assessed on knowledge associated with white middle class cultural norms, Lisa remains discouraged that her students are not necessarily able to demonstrate their ability and intelligence. She describes her issues with the setup of the current curriculum and design utilized by her district. Her concerns reflect the need to change the development and implementation of curriculum and standardized testing:

I don’t think our curriculum geared towards children and when I say our children; not just the African American children being at the school that I am at now, I am looking at this and I am like—not to be disrespectful I don’t want to just talk about one group of people. And I don’t think that they—and that’s the district in the state that they do not gear testing and curriculum towards us. The current testing; I had another girlfriend who is at another elementary school and she had to read a test to a child because you know that happens and she said, called me talked about; what’s this about a Pommel or something, I said what. I said, I only know what that is because the high school that I went to actually had a gymnastics team and so because we had a gymnastics team we actually had gymnastic equipment and that was a section of our, part of our gym class because we had the equipment but If you were not on a school that has a gymnastics equipment, if you are not somewhere in a suburbs riding a horse you have no idea about a Pommel or Pommel horse but that was on a test. How was that an accurate display of my intelligence if I have not been exposed? That’s what I mean by the testing and curriculum is not geared towards our children, that’s not a fair assessment when you have no exposure, cellar is not fair.

According to Lisa, learning from the experiences and perspectives of others is
necessary for growth. As a military brat, Lisa learned early on, how to work with people who were very different from her, and as a result, values the diverse ways of thinking and learning. Yet, content within the curriculum does not provide such opportunities. To this end, urban students are less likely to encounter the diverse experiences that Lisa believes to be necessary to learning. Through her experiences, Lisa shares how exposing oneself to various ways of living might benefit others. As retold through her experiences, this opportunity does not propose the preference of one perspective over another, but does illustrate the appreciation of considering others’ stance in relation to their story or struggle. Lisa spends time discussing the importance of this appreciation as a result of her own experiences:

I love the diversity. And I don’t think our children always appreciate the diversity or appreciate the other things that other people have to offer. It’s okay to be different and still be you. It’s okay to see something different but still be you. I don’t think our kids understand that. You need to go leave the city to see what else is going on beside what’s going on in your block, what’s going on in your city and you would be surprised with the amazing things that you could see and maybe how much more you could accept this person next to you.

The participant narratives from both interviews and focus groups suggest that participants were willing to disrupt the norm and provide urban youth with supports that were beneficial to their academic and social growth. Such stories uncover the importance of teaching and learning approaches, community experiences, and authentic relationship development. Although participants expressed the importance of supporting urban youth through different approaches, many encountered consequences that they had not anticipated. Ironically, as participants worked to support their students, they were met with tension and conflict amongst colleagues. The encounters of participants and colleagues are explained within the next section.
“Get that wall up.” Kim’s interruptive experience at work has forced her to draw a conclusion that has frustrated her: her white male colleague gives her a hard time because she is not only black, but also a woman. Kim had gotten to such a point of helplessness that she felt the need to obtain support from the administrator. She describes how her colleague was purposely trying to embarrass her, bringing her to question the influence of gender and his method of communication. Kim is also concerned with the fact that her colleague is not only disrespectful to her as black woman, but he also tries to jade her reputation. Her solution to this mistreatment is similar to that of many oppressed peoples: to keep to themselves, as to not rock the boat. Kim’s experiences with Mr. Guy illustrates why she does not trust him or his intentions. Additionally, Kim’s story sheds light on the influence of power, as it relates to race and gender. She provides details of this account below:

But like with Mr. Guy...okay with Mr. Guy, I think he has a problem with women and that I'm black too, yeah. Every year there's a problem, every single year, every year. And this year I've been trying to be nice to him but we got into it and our principal, head principal, during a boy's game, it was right after our practice during a boy's game, I say "Could you please talk to him...could you please talk to him cause he's lying and he's not fair." I've been doing this for longer than he has been in his position. Always had a 5:00 o'clock practice, always, and we had a argument, Mr. Jester was out there, he settled it, still had my time, and he tried to make me look bad and for what? For nothing, because I'm black and because I'm a female, and it's probably more I'm an female thing, I don't know, but Mr. Jester settled it...he settled it and he tried to be nice to me but I don't get too comfortable with people trying to be nice cause he's tried to be nice every year after he's done something stupid or ignorant, yeah. So I stay to myself like I said. Get that wall up.

Kim’s frustration is attributed to the disrespect of a fellow staff member. Kim described how her white male colleague’s responses and reactions to her position and role caused her to feel unimportant or irrelevant. She explains how she was forced to ask
for support from an administrator to ensure she and her students were being treated fairly, which was frustrating, as she had more years of experience. This encounter forced Kim to see herself as *not equal to* her white colleague, as she humbly sought the support of an administrator. She did this knowing that she was more qualified than her colleague but realizing that she was still a black woman.

Sharon understood that her colleagues did not respect her. Perceived as an assistant, Sharon attempted to cope with the disrespect that accompanied the assumptions of her colleagues. She stressed that she did not seek nor wish to have more personable relationships with her colleagues. Sharon had been burned so bad by colleagues that she too would much rather be alone. Her feelings disclosed a larger concern that has to do with school climate, as she believes it is necessary for her to isolate herself from her colleagues and limit the personable relationships: “If I'm co-teaching, which I will be co-teaching, I don't want to talk personal, I just want to keep it all business. So because of what transpired last two years like I just don't want to be bothered, I don't want to take it to a personal level, I want to keep it strictly professional.”

Sharon and has gotten to the point that it is better for them to stay away from colleagues. Both were committed to supporting their students, but learned that this came with the cost of being ostracized by colleagues who did not possess the ability to *switch hats*. Kim argues that the more that she supports and advocates for her students, the less likely she will have a positive relationship with colleagues. For this reason, Kim and some of the other participants try to stay clear from their colleagues. Kim argues that they are jealous of her ability to build relationships. For Kim, the more she is liked by her students, the less likely she is liked by her colleagues:
I remember one year one of the principals bumped heads with me, she was jealous of me, but then at the end of the year she said, "I know all the kids like you," and I was like "They do!" And then she was like "That's why I send them to you cause I know they come to you. They come to you all the time so I just send them to you." Like I was the counselor, which was fine you know cause I feel, they probably feel like I'm not going to say nothing to nobody else about their situation, and they trust me and, they just—they like me. Some of the teachers like me a lot, some of them care a lot, some of them are jealous, very jealous; some of them say stuff, I heard they say stuff and I'm like "For what?" It's just jealousy. I say to myself so we're not really worried about what they say out there but I do know there are some jealous people. Just like the principal was jealous. I'm friendly to everybody, if I see them in the hall I speak. I just…I don't go hang with people. During my lunch break I might go to the gym or leave and go to lunch and come back, but I stay to myself.

Both Kim and Sharon have withdrawn from their colleagues, and for similar reasons. Kim and Sharon’s experiences revealed that the relationships they developed with their students, and the ways in which they advocate for students causes their colleagues to question their abilities as professionals. Ken shares this conflict through a realization he has about colleagues:

Our colleagues think that we enable our students to be off the chain, and because we have a relationship and we don't have a punitive mind state, we don't have a mind state that many officers have when they're sicking dogs on young people. I said "Trump removed your mask of civility, your mask of civility." So oftentimes in these predominantly white environments they feel that we are being... playing favors, that we aren’t punishing students the way that they need to be punished, and so therefore they have a problem with often times black teachers and staff and admin, and practice subterfuge on your land in the districts. And I think many African-American teachers and staff go through the same thing." And I told them that to their face. "Donald Trump removes your mask of civility.

Ken argues that his colleagues have lost sight of the importance of supporting the change of behavior among students, as well as the differences in culture as a result of class and race. The difference in beliefs between Ken and his colleagues speaks to a wall that exists as a result of what he calls “subterfuge.” Ken argues that many African American teachers intentions are questioned by white colleagues because of the types of
relationships and supports they provide. He acknowledges the ability of African Americans who are able to understand the complexities of African American culture. Ken argues that his colleagues would rather see more punitive consequences issued to students and that others who think differently are enabling the students, illustrating the lack of cultural understanding among his colleagues. Ken furthers that race matters to this perspective, as African American teachers practicing a more developmental approach of supporting students are not be supported by colleagues. Ken shows that he realized the complexities within policy, social institutions, and among racial and cultural differences, although many of his colleagues might argue that his approach encourages students to misbehave. He also believed his colleagues did not adjust their approaches for working with minority students illustrating their lack of empathy and respect for multiple perspectives and experiences.

**Summary**

This study purpose was to explore the identity development of African American teachers. More specifically, this study attempted to understand the schooling experiences that were influential to the development of the approaches and beliefs of the participants. Through the stories and lived experiences of the participants, connections between policy, time, and context provided the framework for capturing the similarities across narratives. The struggles with working within oppressive systems, the reservoir on past relationships and positive supports as well as struggles, and the ways in which participants now support current urban students, allows for a more focused understanding of the individual experiences of participants, who were influenced by structures and institutions of society.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Recent literature describes the need to recruit and retain African American teachers, as some scholars argue that all students can benefit from working with teachers who come from diverse backgrounds and are inviting of unique experiences to the classroom (Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012). Additionally, researchers contend that minority students are more academically successful when they are able to interact with minority teachers or role models (Moje & Martínez, 2007). With the limited amount of African American teachers available, research must be explored to understand the socialization process of African American teachers. To this end, a careful examination into the biographical and professional experiences of African American teachers might provide insight for recruiting and retaining African American teachers, as well as understanding the methods and approaches that are beneficial to the academic success of African American students.
Findings from this study support the influence of gender, family, education, context, race, and time on identity development. The ways in which the participants’ identities were shaped varied by person, signifying the need to understand individual personal experiences. This phenomenon is not easily understood, as self-interpretations and confirmations from others were key to what participants believed. Moreover, the intersection of race and gender complicated how individuals saw themselves, as reactions from others, and the values of society also influenced the perceptions of self. As examined within narratives of participants, attention to individual experiences not only allowed for the consideration of the various struggles across stories, but also provided a lens in which to analyze shared teaching and learning strategies across narratives that are essential to the survival within oppressive social institutions.

The purpose of this investigation was to understand the ongoing development of identity among African American teachers. Additionally, this research project explored how the beliefs and pedagogy of the teacher were influenced by prior and current, personal and professional experiences. Considering the many factors that exist in regards to one’s identity, this study attempted to illustrate the complex ways in which the identity of African American teachers are developed and activated, and how the experiences of the teacher influenced his or her perspectives and approaches in teaching.

The narrative of participants provided a backdrop in which to explore how desegregation, cultural differences, and school closure influenced their educational experiences. To fully unpack how the biographical experiences among participants influenced the development of participants as students and later as professionals, it is important to explore the policies that have heavily influenced participants during
schooling experiences, and how policy continues to influence the current identity development of the participants. Although a discussion around the influence of desegregation within urban schools was not discussed in chapter two, qualitative research allows for the development and emergence of themes that surface as result of lived experiences, and are captured only through the stories of participants (Galletta, 2013; Saldaña, 2013). Thus, the influence of desegregation appeared as a result of the stories and experiences retold by participants. To this end, an exploration into the influence of desegregation is included within this chapter, as it reveals the methods of adjusting and resisting to the unjust learning experiences minorities encounter within social institutions. Furthermore, a discussion around desegregation provides a framework for understanding how policy and historical events have influenced education and the experiences of participants.

To understand the influence of biographical and professional experiences, findings from this study will be discussed from several different stages of identity development among African American participants. Additionally, findings will be analyzed through the ways in which participants fit within schooling and professional context. The first stage, finding the right fit: a sense of belonging, outlines the supports and lack of inclusion of participants as adolescents during their educational process. The second stage, the right fit: disrupters 101, reflects ways in which participants’ encounters influences the types of supports they provide to students, as a result of past experiences. Also, this stage represents the influence of experiences and encounters on the identity of participants. Finally, the last stage, the right fit: supporting self and others, describes the boundaries and tension that participants face as they attempt to change perceptions of
others, advocate for students, and survive within a oppressive working environment.

**Desegregation in Urban Settings**

Many of the African American teachers within this study shared something common within their schooling experiences; most were socialized within an urban context. The concerns of urban schools stem from the limited amount of resources available. Urban schools are more likely to reflect a high concentration of low income students, support a large population of minority students, have higher enrollments (on average) than suburban schools, have limited resources for teachers and students, are staffed with more inexperienced teachers than suburban schools, and have a larger percentage of classroom behavior concerns, when compared to non-urban schools (Batts, 2012). The plight of urban schools has historically and currently is a pressing topic. The influence of decisions and changes is captured within the experiences of participants. Although political implementation, such as desegregation, was put in place to interrupt unjust and unequal learning experiences, participants continued to encounter unfair and inequitable circumstances. Decisions related to desegregation, such as school closure, further interrupted the educational processes of participants, as they coped with balancing new identities among different cultures and struggled to combat hidden racism.

The stories among participants revealed evidence of institutional and structural racism, as they attended predominantly African American schools, were placed in low or average-ability leveled classes, and were taught by mostly white teachers. Although the ruling of *Brown v Brown v. Board of Education* occurred in 1954, traces of segregated schools and classrooms continued to illustrate the inequitable learning experiences participants faced as adolescents, as well as the similar struggles of their current students.
As a result of such unjust circumstances, participants were forced to either cope with boundaries or barriers in place as a result of race or gender, or develop walls to protect themselves and advocate for their students. 

Important to remember is the resegregating of academic and social experiences among African American participants within oppressive social institutions, and how this influenced teaching and learning among participants as professionals. Such experiences draw attention to how African American teachers utilized former schooling experiences to combat racism, isolation, and marginalization. Thus, past inequitable schooling experiences were not only similar to the current situations urban students face, they also provided participants with a blueprint to support urban students with navigating through oppressive social institutions.

This was made evident within participants’ experience with institutional racism, as they were not only kept from the same learning experiences as whites, but were also not included in decisions that influenced their future or reflected personal interest. The schooling experiences of participants were reflective of significant concerns surrounding urban education today. More recently as noted in the participants’ teaching experiences, though segregation is illegal, the equitable opportunities that should be available to all students are not always accessible for African American students in low-income neighborhoods. Even with policies such as Every Student Succeeds Act of 2016 (ESSA) in taking shape, African Americans continue to be left behind, as there were limited with opportunities available to them, such as the types of courses in which they are enrolled and the supports that they receive. Furthermore, not all urban youth have family members who have the financial resources and social capital needed to combat the
inequitable experiences they might face.

That most participants attended predominantly African American schools as students is coupled with the reality that they were taught by mostly white teachers. As history reveals, this is not a matter of coincidence; it was a result of the lack of direction around how desegregation should occur. White teachers replaced black teachers and black students were oftentimes had their schools closed and were relocated to formerly predominantly white schools. After the ruling of Brown v. Board of Education, black teachers became disposable; having to prove that they were qualified and capable to teach. To this end, cultural misunderstandings and disconnections between students and white teachers did not just occur; instead, the legal displacement of Black teachers is one phenomenon that contributed to it. At the time of desegregation, there was no discussion around the best practices needed to support the achievement of African American students. White teachers were not provided with training or support to understanding the culture of African American students. Even today, current teacher education programs and school districts attempt to address the cultural barriers that exist between white teachers and urban students; however, institutional racism remains at the core of education. This reality makes progression towards equitable learning opportunities more difficult. Moreover, the limited amount of attention paid to white middle class culture as perceived as capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is not present within teacher training.

Across stories, participants shared the lack of support they received within their adolescent schooling years and the academic expectations they had of themselves, as well as the expectations of their teachers. They expressed feelings of disengagement and limited support and resources. Due to their experiences with surviving unjust learning
environments, participants were equipped as teachers with the ability to use past
encounters with racism and oppression to provide urban students with the supports they
were denied. The experiences of oppression within hegemonic social institutions
prepared participants to understand the supports that were beneficial to the academic and
social success of their students. Having reached success as a professional, participants
were in positions to give urban students support that encompassed more than teaching.
Participants also possessed skills and knowledge related to community and cultural
norms, teaching and learning, and offered their students a blueprint for navigating
through oppressed institutions. Instead of continuing the teaching practices that were
unsuccessful for them, participants opted to disrupt the inequitable circumstances of their
students in an effort to prevent patterns of social reproduction among urban youth.

Interrupting Oppressive Systems: Disrupters

As a result of what participants have experienced and learned over time,
participants became disrupters, or African American teachers who are able to support
urban youth in whatever capacity urban youth might need. Therefore, a disrupter is more
than a teacher; he or she can be a coach, community member, a mother, a father, an
uncle, an aunt or a big sister to urban students; he or she is also someone who supports
urban youth through resisting the oppressive systems in place, which continues to oppress
urban students. In other words, a disrupter reflects the African American teacher who
demonstrates authentic care and support; someone who treats urban youth similar to what
is usually expected of their parents: with unconditional love and support. The ways in
which participants disrupted the inequitable learning opportunities provided to urban
youth is very similar to the expectations of Black teachers prior to desegregation:
Although ignored in the American story of civil rights, the tri-fold formula for integration Black educators sought at desegregation is surprisingly simple. In Black schools, Black educators created aspiration. That is, they overtly sought to help Black children believe they were part of the fabric of America and that they should expect to become full participants. They prepared the children for a world that did not yet exist, and they made the children believe they were more than the negative stereotypes America created about them. Additionally, the Black educators provided advocacy for the children. Working in concert with others, though often invisible to those who did not know where to look, they consistently argued against any form of injustice in Black schools, and they continued this advocacy until the demise of their organizations. Black educators expected access when they initially supported integration. In other words, integration was a way to acquire the facilities and resources and opportunities consistently denied Black students. The integration Black educators expected would be an addictive model where their students would maintain access to the aspiration and advocacy they previously supplied while also gaining access to that they had been denied (Walker, 2015, p. 119).

Similar to Black teachers who were unfairly removed from teaching during desegregation, participants also were unfairly placed within oppressive environments; they were the displaced students. Moreover, just as Black educators worked as advocates for black students prior to desegregation, the participants now as teachers found themselves supporting their students in similar ways. The common theme that is evident within the history of desegregation and the efforts of current Black teachers is the need to continue to support urban youth in navigating through oppressive systems.

Participants’ experiences echoed Dubois (1903) notion of double consciousness, as they were forced to consider and be able to exist within two different realities. As such, participants showed how existence within two worlds influenced their roles as teachers and the supports they provided to their students. Thus, their experiences of existing between two worlds provided them insight, as the experiences of going back and forth between both realities informed the knowledge employed to disrupt and counter the educational inequities faced by their students. In other words, participants used personal
experiences with social acceptance and academic context, to design support to disrupt the structural conditions that negatively influenced their students. When participants utilized former experiences as strategies of support, various roles were activated through hat game. The support given to their students (or the hats and roles that participants needed to wear), not only reflect past and present experiences, it also illustrated their knowledge of their student’s culture and community as a result of their experiences.

**Finding the Right Fit: A Sense of Belonging**

Participants’ adolescent experiences suggest that academic and social development of African American students is influenced by engagement, support, and high academic expectations. The tension participants encountered as a result of cultural differences as well as their perceptions of teachers contributed to the academic boundaries and limited relationships with others. However, participants did not feel as if they belonged and that their teachers did not care, which influenced their academic performance.

To ensure that minority students are academically successful in schools, it is imperative that they are socialized within a safe learning environment, where students feel as if they belong and have access to an adult role model that can bridge the gap between home and school cultures (Moje & Martínez, 2007). Additionally, academic achievement among urban youth is more likely when the educational environment “makes space and provides supports for people to engage and persist” (p. 212). For urban youth, engagement and a sense of belonging occur when the teacher and staff can connect the home and community experiences to the schooling experiences. With 84% of the teaching population being white, female methods and approaches of supporting
minority students academically and socially become a concern (Feistritzer, 2011).

Many urban students are socialized under the influence of white women. The disconnection between social class, culture, race, and experiences often becomes the barrier that inhibits authentic learning and academic achievement. It is important to note that findings did not suggest that African Americans were not successful because they had white teachers. Instead, findings acknowledged the need for educators who are willing to do more than just teach. According to participants, this was not something that consistently occurred. Participants were not consistently provided the supports that were critical to their positive academic and social identity development. Instead, experiences revealed pockets of isolation and exclusion, as participants searched for ways to balance their cultural, racial, and academic identity (Moje & Martínez, 2007).

Walker (2015) argues that it is possible that white and minority teachers can have great success teaching Black students. To ensure that black students are academically and socially supported, teachers must be willing to understand the culture of Black students. As participant’s narratives suggest, engagement and a sense of belonging are essential to the development of minority urban youth. Participants illustrate this as they described the lack of relationships among their teachers, as well as how disengaged they were with learning. Thus, teachers need to be able to serve as cultural brokers, who demonstrate the ability to bridge the gap between the home and school environments (Moje & Martínez, 2007).

Across stories, participants recalled the lack of support they received within adolescent schooling years and the academic expectations they had of themselves, as well as the expectations of their teachers. Due to their experiences, participants were
equipped as teachers with the ability to use past encounters with racism and oppression, in order to provide urban students with the supports they were denied. The experiences of oppression within hegemonic social institutions prepared participants to understand the supports that were beneficial to the academic and social success of their students. Having reached success as a professional, participants were in positions to give urban students support that encompassed more than teaching. Participants possessed skills and knowledge related to community and cultural norms, teaching and learning, and provided a blueprint for navigating through oppressed institutions. Instead of continuing the teaching practices that were unsuccessful for them, participants opted to disrupt the inequitable circumstances of their students, in an effort to obstruct patterns of social reproduction of inequalities. The skills and knowledge utilized is represented in the theme hat game and illustrates participants’ ability to transition into the roles needed to support urban youth.

The right fit: disrupters 101. Participants demonstrated the ability to disrupt the inequitable circumstances of urban youth through transitioning through various roles. As such, participants switched to different hats, taking on the role that was appropriate for the support students required. Two different hats were common within this study: the community hat and the family hat. Both hats represent the various skills and knowledge needed to fit the role supportive of urban students. In short, disrupters with the skills, ability, and knowledge to switch roles are able to bring the community to the school (via the curriculum), representation of the school into the community (teacher being visible in the community), and student’s culture to the school (mother/father role). The ways in which experiences, race, gender, class, and culture influenced the identity, beliefs, and
approaches, are captured in Figure 2. The figure illustrates how participants used the skills and knowledge gathered from experiences to disrupt the encounters within oppressive systems for their students.
Community hat: cultural brokers. To wear this hat correctly, the individual needs to have knowledge of the community, must understand the cultural norms, should be visible within the community, and must also understand how to bring the community back into the school. The community hat role is similar to what Moje and Martínez (2007) refer to as the pipeline navigator, and is defined as: “cultural mediators or brokers who supported youth through the educational pipeline via their own experiences” (p 223).

Disrupters demonstrating the ability to wear the community hat share similar experiences with navigating through oppressive social systems. To this end, the support in which they offered is relevant to urban youth. Additionally, community hat disrupters are able to connect what Moje & Martínez (2007) describe as the home and contact zones. The home zone reflects that community of common cultures, where identity is
aligned to the culture of the community. Contact zones are places outside of one’s community and culture, as outsiders are seen as *them* and identity is influenced by power. Community hat disrupters not only understood the differences between zones, they are also able to incorporate the experiences of both zones into the lessons and learning. The blending of urban students community and culture not only allowed urban students to see that they are respected and valued, but it also increased engagement and achievement in the classroom.

The cultural differences that exist between the school and home environment of urban youth are important to recognize and work to blend. When teachers spend time understanding such differences and ensures that he or she respects the cultural norms that exist for the student outside of the classroom, he or she is more likely to have a classroom where all students feel as if they belong. Additionally, providing such an environment is critical to the social and identity development of urban youth, who is forced to figure out how to exist within oppressive systems.

Critical to merging the home and school zones is the ability of community hat disrupters to incorporate the norms of the culture that reflects his or her students. For urban youth, the language or behaviors that they exhibit within the community may not align to those of the school. Therefore, community hat disrupters must support students in understanding how to go back and forth between cultures, as to be academically successful at school, while continuing to be accepted by one’s peers, culture, and community.

Stanton-Salazar (2011) stresses the importance of such non-parental adults in supporting the positive outcomes of disadvantaged youth. Referred to as institutional
agents, the support they offer reflect the use of “resources, opportunities, privilege, and services” (p. 1075) to mobilize low-status youth within oppressive social structures and organizations. Teachers as institutional agents are able to use their positions to provide this type of support, as many urban youth do not have the social networks and social and cultural capital needed for social mobility.

Participants described the importance of code switching and worked to teach students this skill. Like their students, participants must also balance membership between cultures—the one at work, and the culture of their family or community in which belong. As institutional agents, participants used cultural capital from the mainstream community and the community of their students to engage them and to teach them. Participants were aware of the rules and norms “linked to intelligence in dominant settings,” as they have proven to be successful professionals (p 146). Yet, their knowledge of their students’ culture allows them to respect students’ membership in other groups. To this end, participants creatively taught students to be able to go back and forth between cultures, in an effort to empower them.

Although this skill is not apart of the curriculum, participants’ attention to this skill supported the relationships they developed with students and families. Moreover, participants believed that urban students needed to see minorities demonstrate this ability within a professional context, as to change the negative perceptions of Blacks around academic achievement and professionalism.

Community hat disrupters are not only aware of the culture of their students; they are also cognizant of their interest and aspirations. This awareness allows community hat disrupters to provide urban youth with information aligned and learning aligned to their
future, but it also ensures that community hat disrupters empower urban youth to have a voice within their own lives. Furthermore, the effort of the community hat disrupter to understand urban students personally affords the opportunity to build authentic relationships, as well as fostering a relevant learning environment.

**Community hat: empowerment agents.** Common among encounters is the ability and efforts of participants in empowering their students. Empowerment agents are disrupters who:

Challenges us to go beyond liberal impulses to “alter the destinies” of individual youth, only so that they might “make it” in the system, leaving the system, however, largely intact—a new middle-class and a sector of the working class that are perhaps more stable, more diverse, more liberal, but nonetheless, a citizenry now newly addicted to the fruits of societal inequality (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1098).

The strategies of empowerment agents within this study supported the movement of urban youth beyond their current circumstances, occurred within the roles participants embodied, as well as within their teaching and learning approaches. Findings illustrated the various ways that participants critiqued the curriculum, adjusting how and what they taught to provide more meaningful learning opportunities, support the social development of students, and to also challenge students to apply learning within real-world context.

As Friere (2000) points out, oftentimes educators teach from a more traditional approach, where the teacher is the expert who deposits knowledge into students. He argues that this approach is not beneficial to the academic and social development of oppressed students. Instead, students must also be seen as experts who bring their own knowledge about their world and experiences. Through problem posing and unpacking one’s world, students and teachers are able to learn together. Friere (2000) brings up a
point that educators must consider: that oppressed students must be recognized as holding knowledge and are experts of their personal experiences.

Stanton-Salazar (2011) adds that empowerment agents act on behalf of disadvantaged youth and the extent of their role depends on awareness of oppressive structural forces, awareness of the support needed among urban youth, willingness to go against the grain, their identity and ideological commitments, and comfort with being identified as an advocate or agent. The empowerment hat worn by participants was observed within the creative ways participants taught the curriculum and also within the familial roles participants embraced.

**Family hat: just like family.** Participants found themselves acting as kin, providing students with *family-like* supports. The biographical and professional experiences that led them to activate familial roles are captured as a framework related to prior and current identities within urban schools, the influence of resegregation on academic and social identities, and the academic expectations of family.

First, participants’ inequitable learning experiences exist as a result of policy. Although desegregation was put in place to mediate inequalities related to academic achievement, participants still lacked the academic and social supports needed from teachers. To this end, participants become the supports for their students that they did not have. Just as participants’ family and parents expected them to be successful academically, they participants ensure as teachers that they act as family members to their students, supporting students when their family or parents are not around.

To support urban youth to the extent needed, participants found themselves taking on roles that were beyond their professional requirements, such as being looked upon as
family. Family hat disrupters were not only seen as kin (mother, father, sister, or brother), they also demonstrated the ability to wear the community hat, reflecting a cultural and communal understanding among participants. Putting on the family was not as simple as switching hats; it required an art of understanding urban students and building relationships that were so authentic, that urban youth perceived the family hat disrupter as family. This is different than the relationships with community hat disrupters or cultural brokers; this relationship reflects an authentic relationship rooted in care and trust.

The encounters participants experienced educating urban youth led them to understand the supports that their students expanded beyond learning and achievement. Having had experience with navigating through oppressive systems, participants ensured that they provided their students with supports that they did not have within school. Therefore, participants became family to their students, advocating and protecting them. This phenomenon was not initially explored in previous chapters, as the emergence of the family hat surfaced as a result of the stories shared among participants.

How participants supported urban youth differed by gender. Their role as the family hat disrupter was complicated by the gendered ways in which females and males are perceived within families and cultures. Consistent among participants is an obligation to empower urban students. Differences by gender emerged as participants described encounters with students and community members. The stories revealed how participants utilized their own cultural and schooling experiences to become the family support that they needed.
The female participants explained their role and the supports they provided as nurturing. Oftentimes, participants stated that their students perceived them as a mother or aunt, as they were willing to disrupt the oppressed circumstances of their students by protecting and advocating for them. For the female participants, the art of the wearing family hat also came with efforts of being visible in the community.

Male participants also provided students with support; however, the support they provided was more aligned to a father-like role. The stories male participants shared described students seeing them as the provider. This role included giving urban students the resources needed to improve their current situations. The men in this study believed that the community expected this type of support. As such, providing for urban students was natural, as male participants believed that it was their responsibility to be the positive male role model that many of their students did not have.

The influence of roles on the types of support provided is analyzed through intersectionality. As Collins (1998) suggests, intersectionality offers an opportunity to explore the influence of race and gender on teacher identity, beliefs, and pedagogy. The reference to family among participants illustrates the need to unpack how the gendered roles within families have influenced the identity, beliefs, and pedagogy of participants. Collins states: “Because actual family relations are rarely fair and just, using family as a metaphor for constructing an understanding of group processes can duplicate inequalities that are embedded in the very definition of what constitutes a well-functioning group” (p 235). Thus, black female educators take on the auntie or mother role and yet they are marginalized by their gender or race in both the racial and gendered relations between a white male. On the other hand, black men who teach may embrace the role of father or
uncle and also experience racism that makes them a *suspect or dangerous*, or better at disciplining than teaching.

Collins work on intersectionality, specifically family and gender roles highlights the various values that are influential in shaping participants’ identity. Collins cautions that employing a generalized manner of defining the gender roles of African American families disregards the perspectives and experiences of individuals. An appreciation of the values of Black families is evident in the participants’ acceptance and proclamation of their role as kin. Participants illustrate that they are aware and actively participate as an extended family member, who is able to provide supports outside of the community.

Even within family relations, hierarchical systems of power related to race and gender are in place. The roles that are associated with gender, such as female participants acting as mothers or nurturers, or the male participants taking on the role the father as the provider, are reflective of the family roles constructed by society, which in the black family, can be represented in different ways.

As findings suggest, the ways in which community and cultural values influenced participants must be considered in relation to race and history (Jardine & Dallalfar, 2012). Participants did not express a lack of family or parental support, but they realized that they needed to provide this for their students. By taking on the family role, participants expressed the belief that urban students need role models who are supportive like family and who will also teach them using the context and culture in which they are familiar.
The Right Fit: Supporting Self and Others

Even as adults, boundaries and barriers around oppression and inequalities continued to influence how participants supported their students and themselves. As a minority educator, participants described how the perceptions of others not only influenced their students, but also motivated them to redefine black identity, and the negative ways in which blacks are perceived.

Redefining self: “the two-ness.” As professionals, the boundaries experienced among participants reflect the diverse ways of defining blackness. This becomes complicated as social and cultural capital is influenced by the ability of blacks to balance the culture of mainstream, as well as black culture. The ability described is referred to as double consciousness. Brannon, Markus, and Taylor (2015) summarizes it as “the fact that two American cultures—(a) mainstream American and (b) African American ideas and practices—shape the daily lives of many African Americans” (p. 586)

This notion of double consciousness (Dubois, 1903) reflects the reality of African Americans who must master the ability of balancing “two-ness” to be accepted as a member in both groups (Brannon, Markus, and Taylor, 2015, p. 586). Across stories, participants attempted to change the perceptions of their students, hoping that they might be models to show urban students that African Americans can be intelligent and still be accepted by their culture. Among colleagues, participants did not believe that they were not respected professionally, and felt obligated to change the perspectives of colleagues. Participants described the limited amount of models and examples of positive blackness within the media. To combat the negative images influenced by mainstream society,
participants utilized their ability to code-switch, as to gain the respect of students and colleagues.

**Designated identities: redefining self.** The participants in this study illustrated the influence of designated identities, which reflects how others perceived them, and as a result, how they perceived themselves. Participants also shared stories of disrespect around race and gender. Black male participants described being recognized amongst colleagues as the disciplinarian, disregarding their intellectual capabilities. Black female participants were reminded of the influence of power in relation to gender roles, as they were often undermined in more subtle ways, as their professional abilities were ignored.

Sfard & Prusak (2005) describe designated identities as it relates to the boundaries of male and female participants:

Designated identities are stories believed to have the potential to become a part of one’s actual identity. The scenarios that constitute designated identities are not necessarily desired, but are always perceived as binding. One may expect to “become a certain type of person, that is, to have some stories applicable to oneself, for various reasons: because the person thinks that what these stories are telling is good for her, because these are the kinds of stories that seem appropriate for a person of her sociocultural origins or just because they present the kind of future she is designated to have according to others, in particular to those in the position of authority and power” (pp 45-46).

Designated identities speak to the influence of stereotypes, specifically in regards to the expectations and abilities of African Americans. Evidence of power and oppression are made clear within the encounters participants faced that left them feeling disrespected and unqualified to do their job. Their stories echo those of the Black educators who were displaced after desegregation (Walker, 2015).

“Get That Wall Up”

Exploring the ongoing development of participants’ identity reinforces the notion
of recycling (Parham, 1989). According to Parham, Black identity is a process reflecting developmental stages, tasks, and life experiences, where new experiences at different points in one’s life can initiate confusion, thus triggering the process of recycling back through the stages of becoming Black. Important to note is that the trigger is usually negative, causing most to immerse themselves among their own people. As a result, Blacks cycling through often get stuck for some time, as the influence of the encounter causes a rejection of anyone that is not of their own people. What is interesting among Blacks who recycle through at different points of their lives is this idea that recyclers think they have it figured out, they think they have arrived, and then another encounter occurs, triggering the cycle again. Evidence of recycling was found within the stories of participants.

What became clear across stories reflect feelings of diminishment among participants. As discussed by Griffin and Tackie (2015) the balance of existing as a black teacher encompassed more than just teaching. Black teachers are expected to be more than teachers to black students—even those students who are not in their class. Additionally, Black teachers are also expected to use their relationships with their students to enforce the behaviors and expectations of the school, sometimes at the sacrifice of their personal time. Such unwritten obligations take a toll on Black teachers, who are not compensated for their sacrifices, are devalued by colleagues, and who may not respect them as educators.

As participants experienced encounters around oppression, their former perspectives and beliefs of teaching and learning were challenged, and placed them in one of four stages of recycling: early adulthood: internalization, middle adulthood: pre-
encounter, middle adulthood: immersion/emersion, and late adulthood: immersion/emersion. The stages discussed below, provide a framework in which to capture how participants’ identity influenced how they supported students, and the relationships among colleagues. Furthermore, the cycling or recycling through stages illustrates the psychological influence negative encounters had on participants. Although not all stages or recycling are discussed, it is important to keep in mind that at anytime, one can experience an encounter, and cycle back through an earlier stage. What is noted below is reflective of Parham’s (1989) work on black identity and is captured through the lens of participant’s experiences.

**Early adulthood: internalization.** Participants within this category reflect educators attempting to assimilate, yet who recognize how urban students are oppressed. Within this stage, participants demonstrated the ability to code-switch to fit in among dominant society. As such, participants utilized this skill to build relationships with their students, and modeled to students how they might use this skill to be successful within oppressed systems.

**Middle adulthood: pre-encounter.** Success within this category is dependent upon the level of acceptance of dominant white culture. Unfortunately, encounters caused participants to attribute outcomes to racial differences. For example, both female and male participants in this study described the importance of being respected among their white colleagues. Tensions between colleagues were associated with race and gender, and the perception that black participants did not possess the ability of their white colleague.
**Middle adulthood: immersion/emersion.** Participants representing this category have developed a stronger sense of Black pride. They were accepted by whites, but acknowledged their Blackness. Such participants reflected a bicultural or multicultural perspective, as relationships among colleagues were respectful and collaborative.

**Late adulthood: immersion/emersion.** The participants who have cycled through this category described intense emotions associated with teaching practices and beliefs. Additionally, participants stressed the use of culturally relevant teaching and the embedment of social justice concepts. Participants in this stage utilized the curriculum to empower students through the interrogation of curriculum, or by providing authentic learning experiences.

The stages in which participants cycled through were not fixed; they are explored through the various encounters throughout life, and are influenced by the interactions and context in which they exist. The stages that participants described within the study speaks to the methods used to support urban youth, resist the inequitable opportunities within oppressive systems, and survive the struggles of being a minority within professional context. Regardless the stage, participants attempted to provide current students with the supports that they did not have. Whether it was teaching students the art of code switching or advocating for empowerment, participants found strategies to disrupt cycles of institutionalized racism.

**Summary**

The various roles and the ways in which the African American teachers within this study negotiated identities to adapt to differences by race, culture, class, and gender among colleagues and urban youth shows their ability to balance different worlds and
context. Through participants’ stories, we learned that this balancing skill is necessary for the social and academic support of urban youth, as well as a resource for participants to advocate for self. The possession of this skill illustrates the resources marginalized groups need to combat inequitable opportunities that exist as result of oppressive systems within society.

**Limitations of Research**

A limitation within this study lies within the number of participants who participated. Although qualitative studies are designed to explore the individual lived experiences among participants, the small amount of participants and experiences do not reflect the population of African American teachers and therefore, limits the applications of findings.

Also, a limitation aligned to time prevented opportunities to receive additional feedback from participants. For example, six participants participated in individual interviews, while the other six participated in focus groups. Interviews were held in the summer and based upon the convenience of participants. As a result of working to meet deadlines for the study and the barriers of time, there was no time to get further clarification from participants who participated in individual interviews or focus groups. Moreover, the place where the focus group interview took place was located within a community center. The only time that all focus group participants could meet was at a time where only one hour was provided to complete the interviews. As a result, participants who were unable to respond to the last question and those who wished to respond had to respond via email. Likewise, focus group participants were only able to reflect on professional experiences. Thus, it is possible that exploration into the
schooling experiences of focus groups participants would have strengthened findings.

Additionally, two of the participants from the focus group are no longer classroom teachers. One continues to work in an urban setting, while the other works for a suburban school. Although they both have classroom experiences within urban context, it is possible that reflections on professional experiences do not speak to current classroom teaching. Due to the fact that policy changes over time, the experiences regarding policy and classroom teaching may not reflect that of which is currently happening.

Finally, mismatch in the balance of gender within both samples is also a limitation within research. Among the sample of participants who were interviewed individually, there were five females and one male. Within the focus group, there were four males and two females. Although the overall gender distribution was close to even, it may have been beneficial to understand the biographical and professional experiences from more African American males. This could have strengthened findings related to the intersection of race and gender throughout the lives of African American male participants.

Future Research

The purpose of this study was to understand how biographical and professional experiences influenced identity development among participants, as well as how experiences influenced teacher beliefs and approaches. The foundation of Black identity models are influenced and developed from Cross’s Black identity model. Although this model was explored within the literature review, this study was not designed to examine how identity development among African American teachers aligns to various black
identity models. Research around the racial identity of African American teachers, and the influences of racial identity on teacher beliefs and approaches, might inform teacher education programs of ways to recruit future minority teachers. Furthermore, findings might provide policy makers, curriculum developers, and school districts with additional perspectives for educating and supporting urban youth.

One finding that would be worth exploring in the future is around the influence of sports among African American teachers, as many of the participants described the influence of sports in their lives. There are different perspectives and approaches that I would argue one might explore. First, through the influence of sports among African American teachers who were former student athletes and second, the influence of former coaches as role models on the beliefs and approaches of African American teachers. Sports is oftentimes considered as a vehicle for social mobility and not consistently associated with high academic achievement. It would be interesting to understand how one’s identity as a student athlete might influence academic expectations and perceptions between the student athlete and his or her teachers.

Participants also described the importance of relationships among peers. The relationships among peers were so essential to the social development of participants that research around the influence of peers might speak to the ways in which peer support influences the development and identity of urban youth, as well as how such peer support might change once urban students become teachers.

Also important to consider are the ways in which African American teachers develop and nurture authentic relationships among their students through curriculum. Such findings can support future and current teachers who might struggle with building
relationships with urban students. Many districts attempt to mediate the cultural or relational disconnect between teachers and urban students through cultural competency training or providing professional development around culturally responsive teaching. However, there is limited research around the influence of curriculum aligned to the cultural foundations of urban education or the critical analysis of curriculum among minority adolescent and pre-service teachers. As Freire (2000) suggest, such learning opportunities might serve as empowering to minority students and future teachers, as well as influential in recruiting urban students to become teachers.

Additionally, future research aligned to understanding African American teacher identity should include looking more closely at the experiences of African American teachers by gender, to fully consider how gender influences the identity of the African American teacher. Also, research should be deployed to understand how years of experience, policy, and age influences the identity of African American teachers. For example, Bura (2012) argued that school closure in New Orleans was not limited to desegregation. Instead, school closure also occurred due to reasons such as centralized management of public schools by local government, allowing for the entrance of charter schools, as well as the non-traditional hiring of teachers who have taken alternative routes to become educators. The political strategy of illegally firing teachers allowed for the charter school take-over, as teachers were blamed for the underachievement of students. To this end, research around the influence of policy on African American teachers, as well as how history might change one’s identity and teaching and learning approaches.

Within all of the possible approaches to explore, one thing that is common is the existence of the oppressive systems in which African American teachers must navigate.
To this end, research should be explored that unpacks the identity of the *speaking or voiceless* African American teacher. I would argue that this approach might unpack how African American teachers racially identity and how this influences decisions to speak out or remain silent. As African American teachers continue to encounter inequitable learning opportunities and professional context, stories that reflect the struggles of such encounters and how African American teachers respond to them should be examined. The stories of the African American teachers provide insight regarding the influence of oppression on identity.

Finally, this study brought forth concerns around the disruption of oppressive educational systems. Although disruption within this study was a strategy utilized by participants to support urban youth, it also speaks to the indirect ways of sustaining our current educational systems. Future research should be employed around the transformation of such inequitable systems. As suggested in the works of Paris and Alim (2014), perhaps we might find opportunities within the ways we are socialized, to reconstruct the social order that currently oppresses and suppresses minority youth and teachers. In order to promote and sustain a cultural pluralistic society, we must first begin with our beliefs and assumptions that we pass down through education from generation to generation.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to understand the ongoing development of identity among African American teachers. As suggested in research, identity is constantly changing, and is heavily influenced by context. This study examined the complex ways in which the identity of African American teachers is developed and activated, and how
the experiences of the teacher influences his or her perspectives and approaches in teaching.

As public education faces this current era of standards and teacher accountability, concerns regarding teacher recruitment and teacher retention among African American teachers continue to illustrate the difficulty in diversifying the teacher population. Moreover, African American teachers must find ways to negotiate their identity within an oppressive system of power, where deep and lasting experiences have influenced their views about themselves. As revealed through the stories of participants, the experiences of African American teachers working in urban environments can lead to African American teachers who exit the profession early, or who may choose to become more passive in his or her efforts in educating urban youth.

Findings from this study illustrate that the identity development of African American teachers is critical in understanding how to support African American students. Additionally, findings can be used to support the development of pre-service teachers and current teachers, specifically in exploring methods of connecting and advocating for urban youth. Likewise, narratives described the influence of institutional racism within the foundation of school systems as well as within curriculum that continue to contribute social reproduction. To this end, it is imperative that teacher education programs as well as current teachers and leaders invest time to understand and interrogate past and current reform and policies, as to better support and empower urban students. Teacher education programs must also utilize the stories and experiences of African American teachers to understand how to recruit and train African American teachers.

It is also critical that we continue to unpack the decisions of African American
teachers that influence them to leave the teaching profession. If research suggests that minority teachers are needed to support urban youth and to also ensure a more cultural pluralistic society, we must continue to seek to find strategies and supports that will influence the retention of African American teachers. I contend that this work might begin with addressing the many ways that African American teachers are oppressed within the professional context, specifically with how they are devalued among colleagues, and how they are perceived as being subpar and able to only teach Black students. Finally, it is imperative that administrators and school leaders explore the experiences of African American teachers and other marginalized groups, as diverse perspectives are not only inviting of different ways of supporting students, but also allows leaders to understand how to ensure all staff feel a sense of belonging within the professional context.
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APPENDICES
TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research Question:
  How do the biographical and professional experiences of African American teachers influence the ongoing development of identity, beliefs, and pedagogy of African American teachers who teach in urban settings?

Basic Teacher Questions (Teacher profile)
  1. How many years have you been teaching?
  2. What grade do you currently teach?
  3. What content area do you teach?
  4. Describe where you teach now. What does it look like and who your students are
  5. How do you racially identity?

Sub-question:
  1a. How do biographical experiences, such as schooling experiences, influence the ongoing development of identity, beliefs, and pedagogy of African American teachers who teach in urban settings?

  1. Could you talk about your experience as a high school student?
     a. Academics
        i. Expectations of self
     b. Relationships with teachers
        i. Expectations of teachers
        ii. Reflective of personal beliefs?
     c. Relationships with peers
        i. Reflective of personal beliefs?

  2. Could you talk about what you valued most about school?
     a. How did teachers/staff/parents/peers support this?

  3. Could you talk about how your past schooling experiences have influenced you today?
     a. How you teach
     b. What you believe
     c. Successful and critical for students to know

Sub-question:

Urban, Pedagogical, Identity, and Belief Focus:

  1b. How do professional experiences, such as experiences with place-based education, influence the ongoing development of identity, beliefs, and pedagogy of African American teachers who teach in urban settings?

  4. Could you talk about your decision to go into teaching?
a. (why urban)

5. What were the critical moments in your years as a teacher in terms of your thinking about your work? Could you talk about what happened to you and how it informed your teaching?

6. Are there other things you want to tell me about your beliefs about teaching?
   a. Type of teacher he/she believes self to be

7. How do you think your students would describe your and your teaching to his or her peers?

8. How do you think your colleagues describe you to each other?

9. How do you see your role in the classroom? Describe the connection between your racial background and what you see as your role in the classroom.

10. Is there an experience that you would like to share with me that led you into teaching?
    a. How has it influenced your approach
    b. Life altering event that placed you into teaching

**Professional Experiences Focus:**

11. Could you talk about how you engage your students?
    a. Community/home experiences
    b. Personal prior knowledge used?

12. Tell me about the learning experiences that you believe are necessary for student achievement

13. Could you tell me how your students respond to your teaching?
    a. What is occurring when they are engaged and how do you encourage this? Are they achieving as well?
    b. What is the disconnect when they are not engaged and how do you work to change it

14. Could you talk about the barriers you face within your classroom?
    a. Teacher autonomy
    b. Support
    c. Environmental/context
    d. Relationships with colleagues/students/parents
    e. State/local policy constraints
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Focus Group Questions

1. Why did you become a teacher?
2. Could you tell me why it is important to have African American teachers?
3. What do you believe your role is an African American teacher?
4. Tell me what you believe the school’s community believes is your role as an African American teacher. How is this different or the same than the role your colleagues believe?
5. Could you talk about the specific approaches you use to engage your students?
   a. Experiences of students
   b. Interest of students
   c. Culture of students
6. Describe any barriers that you believe African American students face. What are the barriers that African American teachers face? What is most critical to the success of the African American teacher and African American students?